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[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



["HEMYN! HEMYN! WILL YOU KISS ME IN TOKEN OF GOOD FAITH?" SAID NUGENT.]

HANDS AND HEARTS.

[A NOVELETTE.]

CHAPTER I.

In the great State Chamber of Anstey Castle his lordship lay dying. He had lived the years allotted to men; he had suffered and sinned, had his pleasures and his pains, and now all would soon be over, and, alas! alas! there was not one to regret his going. He had been a tyrannical husband to the wife he had wedded only twenty years ago; he was a stern master, a hard landlord, and a relentless foe. No one was sorry that the end was near for him; even his young daughter, summoned in haste from the French convent where she had been educated, and where almost all her life had been spent, could only feel awe, and not grief, at the great approaching change. She knew so little of him; once every year he had paid her a duty visit, which was as terrible an ordeal to her as to him, for his manner had

always been that of a stern guardian, not a fond parent. Her sex was an offence against him, he had wanted an heir, and this girl was the only issue of his unfortunate marriage. Folks said that he had been so angry with his wife because she had not given him a son, that by systematic harshness he had broken alike her spirit and her heart, so that the poor lady was buried in the Anstey vault, long before twelve moons had passed over her baby's head.

Now the vast estates and his almost colossal fortune would pass to a slip of a girl but just eighteen; but the title would go to an almost penniless nephew, Nugent Anstey.

As he thought of this the dying man's face darkened; he hated to think that another man—not his son—should take his style; that his name would probably be lost by the subsequent marriage of his daughter. Then suddenly a flame of triumph lit up his fading eyes beneath the heavy brows. There was a way to keep the title in his own immediate family; it should be taken. He never doubted of his ultimate success; all his life long people had bowed down before him and done his will

—he would be king to the end. He stretched out his long, lean hand and touched the bell; in an instant his valet appeared, soft of foot, deferential in voice and manner.

"Telegraph for Mr. Nugent Anstey," said his lordship, "let there be no delay. Say that it is necessary I should see him to-night—the time grows short."

With a bow the man retired, and presently the message was speeding on its way. Just as day was closing in, Mr. Nugent Anstey arrived. He was a tall, handsome looking young fellow of some seven and twenty years, with just a touch of hauteur in voice and manner, just such a son as my lord would have delighted in.

He spoke some few commonplace words of greeting and sympathy, for indeed he knew scarcely more of his noble relative than his daughter did. His lordship waved them aside.

"Sit down," he said, "I wish to talk business with you, and I am quite impervious to flattery."

A sardonic smile curved his thin pale lips as he spoke, and his eyes grew bright as he noticed the red flush mount to the young man's brow.

"I am ready to listen," Nugent said, coldly, too proud to reply to the overture.

"That is well. I believe I am not mistaken in supposing your income does not exceed four hundred per annum. If I am wrong, pray correct my figures."

"You are perfectly right."

"It is scarcely likely that you maintain the position you do on that sum."

Nugent laughed shortly. "I am head over ears in debt; it can't be otherwise. I was given no profession; perhaps I have no aptitude for one."

"Then how do you intend keeping your head above water?"

"That is just what I cannot do; I shall have to look out for some post which does not call for too much brain or energy."

"Such a post is always easy to get," sneered his lordship. "Why don't you marry?"

Again the blood rushed into the young man's face. "I cannot keep myself; what should I do with a wife?"

"You must choose a rich one; you will have the title you know, and women will sell their very souls for such a thing. You may think that this conversation is irrelevant, but if so you are mistaken. I have a wife and a fortune ready for you, if you will but say the word. I have no wish that an outsider should reap the benefits of my lucky investments. You will, as I said, have the title, my daughter the estates and money—what is to prevent a marriage between you?"

Nugent was staggered a moment by this proposition; then he said, "You forget that my cousin is a complete stranger to me, and that her wishes may not coincide with mine."

"Ermyntrude will not dispute my authority," grimly "and you need not suppose that because I thus thrust her upon you, as it were, that she is unbecomingly stupid. She is neither. I have told you my reasons for this union. I don't profess personally to be interested in my daughter's future, but I do consider my race—and, sir, I will move heaven and earth rather than feel that strangers shall rule here. Now, what is your answer—do you agree?"

"I should have told you before," Nugent said, confusedly, "that I am already greatly attached and all but publicly engaged to a young lady."

"With a fortune?" interrupted his lordship.

"No, she will be quite penniless."

"And why is your mutual attachment not to be made public property?"

"Because her people regard me as ineligible."

His lordship smiled significantly. "Of course you believe in the girl's fidelity?"

"I should be a cad to doubt her."

"I would not be sure of that. See here, I will give you every opportunity to secure your future welfare. You shall write the lady in question, giving her a plain statement of your position; telling her of the fortune which will be yours if you marry your cousin—of the poverty which she as your wife must share if she elects to remain faithful. If, on the contrary, she withdraws from her engagement—"

"Then, sir, having found her false, I will marry the wife you have provided—if she will accept me."

"Very good; when you have seen your cousin, you must write your fiancée—my condition admits of no delay." Again he touched the bell, and the valet appeared.

"Send Miss Ermyn to me," said his lordship, and presently there came the soft rustle of a woman's skirts; then the curtains were parted, and Nugent saw one of the loveliest girls he had ever met—only she was not his style. She was tall and slim, with great masses of corn-coloured hair rippling about the small, shapely head; and the eyes, which looked at him from under level black brows and sweeping lashes were intensely grey. The colour came and went fitfully in her fair

face as she met her father's glance, and she said, in a sweet though nervous voice,—"You sent for me, papa?"

"Yes. I want you to know your cousin Nugent. When I am gone he will be your only living relative; you should be good friends, such as you and I have been, my dear," with that cruel smile of his which always made her wince, and roused an angry feeling in his nephew's heart.

"This is my daughter, Nugent; she is commonly called Ermyn—an absurd abbreviation invented by her nurse, I believe." Then as the young people shook hands, he added, "Take him away to dinner; after that you must spare him, as he has important business to transact."

He watched them as they went from the room. They were a goodly pair: Nugent with his great stature and splendid proportions, his typical Saxon beauty; Ermyn tall too, and as fair as he, yet with a sweet shyness which made an admirable foil to her cousin's proud and half defiant bearing.

"If only I can compass their marriage, I will forgive the girl her sex," thought the dying man, as he turned restlessly on his pillows. "Would that I knew how that penniless girl will reply! May she be as false as Oressida!"

Duly that night Nugent wrote his letter; it was very manly and sincere. He told the woman he loved, all the truth; he did not seek to hide his past extravagance, or his present financial difficulties; but he implored her by their mutual love to have patience. He would work for her as never man worked before; and if she would be content to live humbly, he never could regret taking the step which her friends condemned as madness. He loved her with all his heart and soul; would not she trust him?

He told of his uncle's strange proposition, and of the wealth which might be his for the mere taking, and concluded with the words: "But I value wealth now only for your sake, Beatrice; without you, what can it do for me? Sweet! I do not doubt your faith, I know you love me with a whole heart; but I want again to read your written vow, to know that you are ready in the near future to trust your life's happiness to me."

And then he waited impatiently, but never distrustfully, for Beatrice Clayton's reply. On the second day it reached him; but it was not what he hoped.

"My own dear Nugent,

"I hardly know how to write in answer to your entreaties; if I dared obey the impulse of my heart, I would fly to you at once and never, never leave you any more. But oh! my dear, you must see that the step you propose would be suicidal to both; I have nothing, you are deeply involved, and I am all unfit to be a poor man's wife. It is hard to part, cruelly hard to say good-bye, but there is nothing else left us to do. For your own sake you must marry Miss Anstey, we could not live upon an empty title. As for me—oh! Nugent, you must forgive me, but after I received your letter, and learned how hopeless were our dreams, I tried to put all thought of you away. And so, to please mamma, and, indeed, to help you to make a wise decision, I have to-day accepted Mr. Delap. Forgive me, but do not forget me; I shall love you all my life! If fate had been kind we might have been so happy. Now when we meet, if meet we must, let it be as friends only; that will be best for you and best for me. Do not think I am happy in my new condition; I shall never be happy any more."

"Your miserable, loving
"BEATRICE."

The letter fell from Nugent's hands, his face showed blank and white in the clear light of the July evening. At first he could not grasp its meaning; he could not think this girl he had idolised so very false to all the passionate vows she had vowed as she clung

to him, her dark eyes raised to his with the great light of love in them. After all, the dying man knew more of human nature than he. Beatrice was false; she had sold herself to a man old enough to be her father, ugly as Caliban, but rich as Croesus. He laughed harshly, picked up the daintily perfumed letter, and tore it into a thousand pieces.

"That chapter is ended," he said, through his set teeth, "now let me turn to the next." He laughed again as he remembered his promise to Lord Anstey, "Having found her false, I will marry the wife you have provided."

"Why not?" he asked himself; "she is good to look upon, of spotless name, and too young to have known any other lover—and I shall treat her kindly."

With frowning brows he went into his uncle's presence. He was hard hit, but, like a true Englishman, he gave no sign of this, as he said, quite collectedly, "I have considered your proposal and am agreeable to act upon it, provided no influence is brought to bear upon my cousin; she must be a free agent."

His lordship smiled mysteriously.

"Ermyn delights to do my will. But the lady of whom you speak? Tell me, did I prophesy truly?"

"Yes," said Nugent, not without some evident effort at calmness, "she has decided to marry another man who can give her her heart's desire."

"It is the way of the world. Well, I will acquaint Ermyntrude with my plans, and to-morrow we will have Snellgrove, my solicitor, over here to draw up the deeds. One day you will doubtless be thankful to your fickle fiancée that she proved wanting when weighed in the balance. No woman is worth the sacrifice of position and fortune," with which cynical and characteristic remark his lordship dismissed his nephew from his presence. Then he summoned his daughter, who came in fear and trembling, for generally an interview with her father meant whole hours of suffering to her. But to-day he was inclined to be gracious; perhaps for the first time he realized how beautiful she was.

"Sit close by me, Ermyn, my voice fails me, and I have something to say to you; something which must affect all your future life."

She obeyed, her heart palpitating all the while against her side; the gentle voice in which he addressed her, touched her to the keenest pity. Surely her father must be very near to death when he could speak and look kindly upon her.

"I am ready to hear," she said, softly, and touched his hand with her own warm fingers.

"And to obey, I hope," he answered, mildly; "it is your duty to do so, and in what I am now doing I am consulting your happiness and the glory of our race. I believe you have never yet had a lover; the Sisters are too careful to allow any such folly; am I right in supposing you are 'heart whole and fancy free'?"

She flushed deeply, and said with gentle dignity, "You know how guarded my life has been."

"Ah, yes; but the serpent contrived to enter Eden, my dear," he answered, with a mocking laugh. "Still I am willing to accept your word, as it makes matters so much easier all round. I have resolved not to leave you to the care of a guardian, who would probably squander your fortune for you, but to marry you to your cousin Nugent."

"Father!"

"Well, my dear, what have you to say against my proposal?"

"Everything!" she cried, forgetting for the moment all her fear of the sick man, "everything! I have known my cousin in all but two days; he has not shown any special liking for me. I—oh, father! I am not to be consigned to him like a bale of goods."

She dropped on her knees beside his bed, so that her face was on a level with the wicked old face that smiled so sardonically.

"In Anstey Castle my will is law; your cousin has proposed for you. It is your interest as well as his that this marriage should take place. That fool Humphries gives me just a week of life—you will change your state before I go, or for aught I care you may suffer most abject misery. If you refuse, I shall will that you spend the three years intervening between my death and your majority with the Jocastrian Sisters. You know what that means. But I do not suppose for an instant that you will force me to such harsh measures."

"But—but," she pleaded, "my cousin cannot wish such a thing; he has known me so short a time."

"There is love at first sight?" sneered his lordship, "and beauty is a magnet. Go to Cherry and tell her what I have said; you will at least have faith in the advice she will give. And remember that you are to be ready for the 'happy event' on Friday—that gives you three whole days for maiden meditation. Go!—when you come again bring your answer with you."

And Ermyn went out like a chidden child. In nurse Cherry's arms she sobbed out all her story, all her humiliation and grief; and whilst the motherly woman comforted her she murmured, "It is all for the best, my dearie; many and many an Anstey lady has married before she came to your years, and been happy. Then Mr. Nugent isn't like a stranger, and he's a fine honourable gentleman; and though, perhaps I ought not to say this, his lordship hasn't been over kind to you, it's clear he's got your welfare close to his heart. After all, my dear one, he's your father, and it's hard to go against the wishes of the dying."

And much more she said in the same strain, until bewildered as to right and wrong, weary with weeping, tired of fighting against fate, Ermyn said, "I suppose it must be as papa wishes, but I never thought to be married thus. Oh, Cherry, dear old Cherry, why was I not born a peasant girl?"

The nurse had no answer to this exhortation, she could only kiss and fondle her foster child, while she felt a thrill of relief that at least her darling would not be left alone in the world.

Ermyn did not see her father throughout Wednesday and Thursday, but on Friday she was summoned to his room, where she found Nugent and the Reverend Clarkson awaiting her. The former taking her cold hand led her forward, saying, "Ermyn, it is by your father's wish you are brought here so abruptly—for his sake try to feel kindly towards me."

CHAPTER II.

SHE had no reply to make; she was like one in a troubled dream. As in a vision she saw the grey face upon the pillows, the kindly, encouraging smile of Cherry; and then she acted and spoke mechanically, just as they bade her.

To her the solemn words she uttered had then no meaning. She was promising to love, honour and obey this man who, but a few days ago, had been but a name to her. His ring encircled her finger; his cold kiss upon her brow told her that the ceremony was ended now, that she was a wedded wife—that until death released her from her bond, she belonged to him by all the laws of Heaven and man.

With a little choking sob she stretched out her hands to Cherry, and from the bed came the faint voice sneering out its commands. "Take her away, nurse; tears are usually the bride's accompaniment to a wedding, and I hate tears. Nugent, let us have Snellgrove in and finish the settlements."

So was the bride dismissed from the bridal chamber, to take refuge with Cherry in her own cosy room. Ermyn sat down by an open window looking listlessly out, whilst the nurse hovered caressingly round her.

"Deary, haven't you a word to say? Isn't it better you should have some one to care for you when your father is gone? And Mr. Nugent is a fine handsome gentleman!"

"He never said that he cared for me," Ermyn said, drearly; "and how can he, when we scarcely know each other? He never even asked me to marry him; he took it all for granted."

"That was natural dearie, seeing he knew my lord wished it; and the love will come! Oh! I'll live to see you a happy wife yet!"

But the girl was sunk in her own thoughts, and made no reply; she sat twisting the golden circlet about her finger in a half angry, half mournful way, and silence fell upon them. It was broken at last by Ermyn saying in a low, strange voice, "It is all a lie and a sham, and no good will come of it. I wish that I were dead!"

"Oh, Miss Ermyn! and this your wedding day! Dearie, you are all unstrung by trouble and excitement; when you have had time to think, you will be glad that there is some one to watch over and care for you!"

"Perhaps," said Ermyn, wearily; "but I think gladness is far away from me."

She did not see the bridegroom until they met at dinner, and then she would not, or could not, lift her eyes to his, and the sense of constraint upon them was painful; the conversation of the most limited character.

When at length Ermyn rose from the table, Nugent made a desperate effort to say something kindly and appropriate.

"Ermyn," he began nervously, "as we are to pass our lives together, we must hasten to become better acquainted. I do not profess to give you more affection than you can bestow upon me, but I promise to treat you with all gentleness and consideration; I will study your wishes so far as is possible, and in all things do my best to compass your happiness."

The deep wistful eyes met his a moment. She was grateful to him for his kindness, but she could not quite forgive him that he had made her life with or without her will; so murmuring only, "You are very good—I will try to please you," she glided away, leaving him frowning and uneasy, dissatisfied with the world generally, and especially dissatisfied with himself.

Later on, Ermyn, sitting alone, heard the sound of hurrying feet, then the rattle of wheels along the drive, the echo of the doctor's voice, and felt with a great heart sinking that for her father the end had come. She caught her breath, and rose hurriedly; ought she to go to him? She had never looked on death, she did not love the dying man; and whilst she hesitated, being torn this way by duty and that by dread of what she scarce could tell, some one knocked at her door. When she opened it she saw her husband; he put out a kind hand to her, saying, "My poor girl, it is all over—he died quite quietly."

She sank down upon her chair; she felt so utterly desolate, so much at the mercy of a hard world. "Be kind to me," she whispered, brokenly. "I am very wretched;" and he, having no love to give her, stood by in pained silence.

Presently she lifted her head, "You must show me my duty and I will try to do it; but because of my ignorance and helplessness you must have patience with me. Let me go now. I want time to understand my new position. Leave me to learn my lesson, until—until he is buried;" and so he suffered her to go. He hated himself for his coldness, and because his heart still bickered for the woman who had deceived him—that little, laughing, violet-eyed witch, who had sworn so deeply to love him always, who had so cruelly betrayed his faith.

He saw literally nothing of Ermyn until the last solemn day when Edwy, Lord Anstey, was carried out to his last long home; then, as he stood in the hall, he felt a light hand on his arm and heard a voice saying:

"You will not expect me to go?—I could not, that is, if you do not insist."

"By all means remain at home," he said, and the glance she gave him was full of thankfulness. He sighed a little as he watched the slender, black-robed figure sitting upstairs, and then he fell into his position amongst the mourners, and for a while forgot all about his lovely bride. And Lord Anstey being buried, he and the solicitor dined together; the latter was an old friend of Nugent's and ventured to congratulate him upon his accession to estates and title too.

"Don't," the younger man said; "I was a happier man when financial difficulties were weighing upon me, and I had not the remotest chance of touching one penny of my uncle's money."

"Oh, ay! I heard something of the matter, and I know the lady who played you such a cruel trick; but the present Lady Anstey is far and away lovelier than Beatrice Claydon."

"We do not all see with the same eyes," Nugent answered, coldly, "I suppose my cousin is beautiful, but it is with a beauty that fails to charm me."

He would not so have spoken had he known how near his young wife was. She had been sitting alone through the long hours, and praying with all her innocent, sorrowful heart that her duty might be made clear to her; and as she prayed her marriage vows took meaning and life to themselves, so that she rose in haste to go to her lord, saying under her breath, "I will go to him now, and tell him all that is in my heart; I will try to be a good and dutiful wife, and in time perhaps Cherry's words will be fulfilled, and we shall love each other." So, believing him to be alone, she hurried downstairs before her courage failed her; her hand was even on the tapestry, she was in the very act of entering, when Nugent's words arrested her. She stood like one turned to stone; her arms dropped to her side, but not a moan or cry did she utter.

Then Mr. Snellgrove spoke,—

"Very few men marry their first loves; in most cases it is well they do not; and Lady Anstey is fair enough to fill even Miss Claydon's place."

"She can never do that," Nugent retorted, "I have loved once and for ever. Nothing on earth would have induced me to fall in with my uncle's wishes but the falsehood of my fiancée. Well, she has gone out of my life, and all I have to do is to forget her, an easy thing to say, not so easy to do. But if I had known how my fetters would gail me, I would prefer bankruptcy and poverty to riches and an unloved, loveless wife."

It seemed, as she listened, that Ermyn must fall; but for all her gentleness there was a latent pride and strength in her nature, inherited from her father, which helped her through this sad ordeal. Noiselessly as she had come she returned to her own room, and all that night she lay sleepless on her bed, pondering many things and mapping out her own desolate future. In the morning she rose, pale and heavy-eyed but resolute; in that lonely vigil she had gained years in experience and sorrow. She greeted Nugent with a frigid courtesy; her kindly thoughts of him had naturally suffered change, and her pride revolted at the mere idea of forcing her presence upon this man who so cruelly tolerated her. After breakfast, which indeed was a mere farce for both, she said, coldly,—

"I have something I would say to you, and which admits of no delay. Have I your permission to speak?"

"In all things, Ermyn, you are to please yourself."

A flash of scorn lit up her grey eyes for a moment, then she said, quite quietly,—

"You must make no rash assertions; hear me out first, if you please. By my father's will you and I have joined hands, but our hearts were not included in our bargain. Had I been as wise five days ago as now I am, I would not have been coerced into a marriage which is abominable to both."

"Ermyntrude!"

She smiled bitterly at his shocked expression. She was no longer the innocent, timid schoolgirl; but a woman wronged and scorned. "It is true; hear me out. For your happiness and, perhaps my own, let us part. You give me no love; I owe you no duty or obedience. We are best apart. Take all you will, I only ask a sufficient sum to maintain myself and the little household I shall need. Hush! do not speak. Accept the price of your bondage. I will not live in luxury if luxury means life with you."

Her outbreak so astonished him that he was speechless, and she went on,—

"I came to you last night, anxious to do my duty towards you, to keep, if I could—aye, to the very letter—those vows I made you; but I went away without speaking, for I heard you say that other woman who treated you so ill, was more to you than I could ever be; and that had you known how your fetters would gall you, you would have preferred bankruptcy and poverty to an unloved loveless wife."

His chin sank upon his bosom, his face was shamed, as he said,—

"It is all true, Ermyn. I wish I could deny it; but she was, and is, more to me than life."

Her mouth twitched with pain; but her eyes were steady.

"If when I gave myself into your keeping I did not give you love, at least I cared for no other man. I would have been loyal to you if I could not be affectionate; but I will not accept the position to which you have doomed me. I cannot bear to live with you and day by day see your indifference grow to hatred and loathing. Give me a pittance and let me go."

"Have you thought what a scandal you are bent on making?" he asked, angrily.

"I do not care in the least for the world's opinion, so that my heart is pure and my conscience clear. I shall not blame you; but if you will not let me go—why, then I must find some way to thwart you and help myself."

"Do you imagine," he demanded, still sternly, "that I will rob you of your birthright? I have not sunk so low as that."

"My birthright I do not value at all. I even have no love for my home. I have never lived here or anywhere in England, you know; beyond the servants and a few visitors, none know me even by sight. If I go away, I do not go as Lady Anstey. Give me all I ask, five hundred a year, and set me free. I will take no more, and you will be happier without me."

Oh! sad and strange it was to hear such words fall from a young bride's lips, sadder still that he who heard them could not refute them. Vainly he wrestled with her decision—vainly he pointed out to her to what harsh criticisms she would subject herself. She smiled scornfully.

"I know nothing of the world or the world of me," she answered. "I am content to know nothing. I was happier away in the convent than I ever hope to be again."

Then seeing she was not to be moved by such reasoning he changed his tactics. He asserted his marital rights, and duly expounded the laws of our enlightened land with regard to the relations between husband and wife. She heard him with her sweet mouth grown mutinous, and when he had finished said,—

"You may, and perhaps will, assert your authority; and then there will remain one good thing for me, and that is death."

She looked so much in earnest that a sudden fear assailed him, lest her death as well as her misery should lie at his door.

"Please yourself," he said, folly. "You are henceforth your own mistress. Make what arrangements you like with Snellgrove; he will communicate with me. Whilst relations between us are so strained it is best we should see as little of each other as is possible."

"After to-day," she said in a choked voice, "you will not see me. I shall leave with Cherry before evening. My plans are all in readiness."

"I am not exceeding my rights when I ask where are you going?"

"To Littlemanor. An old friend of mine, Mrs. Bagnall, lives there. She was a teacher in the convent when I first entered, and is now a widow. She will furnish you with all necessary information concerning herself."

"You understand that if you leave me now of your own free will, that for the rest of our lives we are strangers?" he said, frowningly.

"That is what I most desire; and for your sake I hope my life may soon be ended. It will be best for both. And now I leave you, because in no way can I serve you save by going. I wish you all the joy that I have missed, and because I can't quite forget you are still my husband, I will try not to think harshly of you. Good-bye; Heaven send you your freedom," and with that she left him.

Outside the door she paused, her heart beating tumultuously; and had he followed her then, perhaps both he and she might have been spared years of misery; but he remained where he was, and she, toiling slowly upstairs, saw something white lying in her path.

When she had reversed it, she found it was the portrait of a woman, fair and young, for her years could not have exceeded twenty-two.

The face was a small oval, with dimpled cheeks and chin, and framed in a tangle of dark hair; the eyes were saucy, the curved mouth half infantile, half coquettish; and underneath the portrait was written in a woman's hand, "Beatrice."

Ermyn dropped it with a gesture of loathing. This was the false woman who had made happiness impossible for Nugent and herself. Gathering her skirts about her she went softly to her room where Cherry was waiting.

"Is the packing done?" she asked.

"Oh, missy! oh, missy! don't go to do this thing—have patience."

But her father's spirit had risen within the girl.

"Patience!" she scoffed. "Am I a slave as well as a wife that I should tamely submit myself to ignominy and insults? Dear old Cherry, there is only one way before me, and I must take it. If you fear to share my fallen fortunes, remain here at Anstey."

"Oh, my child! my dear child! I do not deserve this from you."

"No, you don't. I am a wretch; but, oh! if you knew how very miserable I am you would forgive me."

And then with wild energy she began to put together such of her belongings as Cherry had forgotten, and before nightfall she had left the home of her ancestors far behind.

On her arrival at Littlemanor, she opened a correspondence with Mr. Snellgrove, in which she begged only for an annuity of five hundred pounds, declining resolutely to take more from the estate.

For the rest she wished to hear nothing of or from Lord Anstey.

"If," she added, "I shall die first, he will be duly acquainted with the fact. Until such a time arrives, I wish to live unmolested and unknown."

"A most extraordinary girl," commented Snellgrove to Nugent; "but really I do not see what good is to be done by opposing her will. Leave it to time; she will soon grow weary of solitude and semi-poverty."

But just in this one thing the solicitor was mistaken.

Of course, Ermyn's strange marriage and strange disappearance created quite a scandal in the county; but if she knew of this, she cared so little that she made no sign.

At stated times she drew, or a friend drew for her, her little income, and gradually she dropped out of memory as she had dropped out of sight. No trace of Mrs. Bagnall was to be found, and everything connected with her and her charge was shrouded in mystery.

The fact was that the widow had married again this time choosing as her partner a middle-aged professor, by name Robert

Sinclair; and as he shared his wife's partiality for Ermyn, the girl's life was not wholly unhappy, especially as Cherry still remained with her.

Only the iron had entered her soul. She never could forget that she was a wife and yet no wife. From time to time she heard faint rumours concerning Nugent and Mrs. Delap. She knew that to some extent, at least, his old love held him in bondage, and she felt scarcely anything save scorn for him.

At the end of three years she went to Weston-super-Mare, and there again she met her husband.

CHAPTER III.

"Here she comes," said Captain Ferrars, adroitly shielding little Mrs. Delap's face from the scorching heat, "I wonder who she is? Anstey, you are not susceptible to feminine beauty, but I think even you will acknowledge this girl's charms are beyond question."

"Oh, Captain Ferrars is desperately enamoured of this fair syren—how do they call her?" drawled the little lady. "Is it Sinker or Stimpson or—"

"It's Sinclair; I suppose the old boy is her governor. Now get on all your armour, offensive and defensive, Anstey; when once you have seen the new beauty you will acknowledge you need it. They will be coming this way soon."

The trio were seated on the pier, and Mrs. Delap half wished Nugent had been absent. Miss Sinclair, as she was called, was younger, and (she had the sense to acknowledge this to herself), lovelier than she had ever been; there was, too, an unmistakable air of breeding about her, and a proud reserve of manner which effectually kept her many admirers at a distance. And Mrs. Delap was not minded to lose Nugent's devotion; she was far too vain to see that long ago he had begun to loathe her service, and, although since her marriage he had not spoken one word of love to her, holding his honour too dear, she firmly believed that she held his heart in the hollow of her hand.

The last strains of music died away; Mr. Sinclair and his companion turned from their contemplation of the sea, and advanced towards the waiting trio. As they drew nearer Nugent listlessly lifted his eyes to the girl's face; then he uttered a sharp exclamation, "Good heavens!" and his own face changed strangely.

Mrs. Delap, with smiling lips and angry heart, said,—

"What is it? Has her beauty infected even you?"

"It is not that," he answered, whilst yet his eyes rested on Ermyn; and suddenly she saw him. She swerved aside ever so little, drew a quick breath, and then walked by calmly, totally ignoring him. He stared at her like one distraught. This proud, beautiful woman was his wife; but she had not forgiven him, she would have none of him. Perhaps he deserved her undisguised contempt; but it was none the less hard to bear, especially when he reflected that, but for her ill-fated marriage, all the wealth of the Anstey's would have been hers, to do with as she listed.

Beatrice Delap, leaning nearer, said,—

"When will you come out of your day dream? And why do you look so strange? Do you know her?"

"Yes, I know her; I have met her several times."

"Then she gave you the out direct" (this a trifle maliciously). "Poor Nugent! But I confess she is beautiful enough to afford a few caprices; half the men here are raving of her, and it is difficult, I understand, to get an introduction."

"I mean to accomplish one before twenty-four hours are gone," said Ferrars, with a laugh. "I have set my heart upon knowing the divinity. I wonder how they call her; do you know, Anstey?"

"We were never on familiar terms," Nugent answered, coldly. Somehow it displeased him to hear Ermyrn discussed by Ferrars and Beatrice; after all she was his wife, and he resented their idle gossip as an insult to her. How beautiful she had grown! she was a woman of whom any man might be proud. And then he thought of his desolate home, his strange position, and was angry with her that she should put such a slight upon him. She would not even wear her name because it was his too. He too would see her before he left Weston-super-Mare. It was neither wise nor right that she should be masquerading thus; he would not allow it. Complications were sure to arise, and it was his duty to prevent any scandal, at least, as far as he could.

Mrs. Delap found him anything but a cheerful companion, and he left her at the first opportunity, much to her disgust. Then he went home to his apartments, determined that he would interview Ermyrn at the earliest opportunity. In the evening Ferrars called upon him.

"Oh, I say!" he began, excitedly, "I've accomplished the introduction I wished for, and, by Jove! the girl is even lovelier than I thought; but she's like an idol. She does not belong to the Sinclairs either: I fancy she is their adopted child, and I am quite positive there is some mystery surrounding her."

"You are always quick to jump at conclusions," said Nugent, coldly, "and Miss Sinclair may be keen enough to see this, and find amusement in mystifying you."

"She would not condescend to amuse herself with me," retorted Ferrars, ruefully; she looked over my head, and in short every where but at me. She left Mrs. Sinclair to entertain me, and when I expressed a hope that she should meet again, she said literally nothing."

"Perhaps she is a beautiful fool," suggested Nugent, with a savage joy in his friend's defeat; but Ferrars laughed out contemptuously.

"There you make a mistake; the few remarks she uttered were all addressed to Sinclair, and they seemed to me full of wisdom and wit. Oh, you cynic! I'll have to introduce you to the fair Sinclair, and then I fancy even your cynicism will break down."

"You forget," said Nugent, "that I am a married man."

Ferrars flushed.

"I beg your pardon, old man," he said, penitently, "I had forgotten. I am awfully sorry—but—but Lady Anstey—"

"Is nothing but a myth to you and the world at large," retorted Nugent.

"She must be a queer sort to desert you so shamelessly."

"Don't! The shame, if shame there is, is mine; no blame attaches to her."

And then the subject dropped, but a little later Ferrars took his leave, and Nugent went out upon the beach. The pier was thronged; but very few people lingered on the shore, and so he wended his solitary way until he saw a tall, graceful figure a little in advance of him, and knew his wife was near. He hastened after her and when he had almost reached her side, he spoke her name.

"Ermyrn!"

She turned quickly, and he saw that she had paled ever so little. Not a word did she say, but, standing there like a statue, waited for him to speak.

"I want to know," he began awkwardly, "how much longer this sort of thing is to go on? Are we never to be anything but strangers, you and I?"

"We settled that satisfactorily long ago," she replied, in soft, cold tones; "there is nothing left us to say upon the subject."

"But," he said, half-fiercely, "I have much to say about it. I will not have my wife masquerading as a single woman. The law of the land gives me almost entire control over you and your actions; I am free to follow

you wherever you go, to enter any house that may shelter you."

"Yes," Ermyrn broke in bitterly, "you are free to persecute me if you find pleasure in doing so; but one thing at least is my own—my life—and it is easy to make one's own quietus. Of this thing rest assured: I never will consent to reign at Anstey Castle with you who consider me an unnecessary and unpleasant incumbrance."

"If we were better acquainted, we might in time become good friends," he urged, lamely, "the experiment is worth trying."

"I think not," she answered, scornfully. "It was perfectly natural you should not love me when our marriage was perpetrated; but it was distinctly unfair that you should love one woman madly and yet marry another. Still, since then I have had time for thought, and I was often ready to receive the olive branch, if you would have held it out to me. But when I went out more frequently, I heard your name and that woman's always linked together; and so I came to know that you were false to your marriage vows from first to last, and that all your heart was filled with unholo love for one who had treated you so badly. I grew to despise you, and, despising you, I refuse to bear your name or share your honours."

"If I promise never to see her, or speak with her again—" he began eagerly, and she interrupted swiftly.

"I should refuse to believe you. How could it be otherwise when I have the memory of the past always with me? When you, a man of the world, so wilfully and carelessly took advantage of a poor, friendless girl's unhappy condition, that you might win those things for which you longed? I was little more than a child when that cruel deed was done. I stood in almost ludicrous dread of my father, and perhaps in my heart I did not dislike you in that very early stage of our acquaintance. I know that if you had but given me kindness you would have earned my most grateful devotion—because kindness was all unknown to me—I would have been your slave right willingly; but you hated your fetters and you were not careful to keep me in ignorance of that fact."

She drew a little nearer to him then, her deep eyes shining with a strange light, and for all its coldness her voice was very soft as she said, "And now for all the pain and shame you have made me endure, you offer me the semblance of love and honour; but I will never accept that, never be content to hold a second place in the heart where Beatrice Delap reigns supreme."

"Her away is over," he answered; he never knew until this hour how much he desired his wife's friendship.

"Is love of such a fleeting nature?" she questioned, sadly. "Ah, then only they are wise who escape it?"

"But it cannot be eschewed; soon or late it must come to you; it is my right to guard my own."

"I shall never forget I am your wife," she said, proudly, "my fetters are too galling ever to be forgotten. Oh! her voice rising almost to a wail, 'why cannot I die and leave you free? it would be so much happier for both; but I am so young, and so very, very strong.'"

"I am sure," he said gently, touched alike by her beauty and her self-forgetfulness, "I should not find it hard to love you now; give me time and chance to try. I have made a mistake of my life, help me to rectify it. Think what a consummate scoundrel I feel when I remember all that I enjoy and of which I have deprived you—"

"I never valued riches overmuch; it was love I craved, and that was denied me. No, no, no; we can never clasp hands as friends, never be loving wife and loyal husband; and so let me go away, and hide myself once more from you. If, doubting you, I yet agreed to cast in my lot with yours, I perhaps should grow in time to hate you. If we meet we are acquaintances at best—and so good-bye."

There was no relenting on the proud, pure face; no least hint of a shaken resolve in the grand, grave eyes. Nugent bowed; he felt there was little more to say. And, perhaps because men always long for the unattainable, a great longing possessed him to break down this barrier of coldness she had raised between them, and to call her his openly before the world; but he only said,—

"At least you will not refuse me the privileges of a mere acquaintance; you will not utterly ignore me?"

"What good can come of any intercourse between us. But let it be as you wish," and then she tendered him her slender, beautiful hand, in token that their interview was ended; and the soft, sweet voice said, kindly,—

"Good-bye, try not to judge me too harshly; and I hope that your life may be happier for you than mine has ever been or can be."

Then she was gone, and he stood moodily watching the slender graceful figure as it slowly disappeared from his view.

"She has grown very beautiful," he said, "and she is as good as she is lovely. Beside her proud beauty Beatrice's charms seemed poor and artificial, although once he would not have confessed so much even to himself. Long ago, he realised now, his old passion had suffered change; even when most he loved her he had not been blind to her faults and follies; and although he believed, and believed truly, that next to herself she loved him best, yet she never refrained from trying to add to her long list of captives. She was a born coquette and unscrupulous as to the means she used to subjugate her followers. As he went homewards he could afford to pity old Mr. Delap, and was very near to congratulating himself upon his own escape."

The next morning he met Beatrice driving her cream ponies; and it occurred to him she looked just a trifle sulky. But she drew up beside him with a smile, saying, imperiously,—

"I want you to join me; I have something to tell you. Please don't keep the ponies standing, they are so fresh."

He obeyed, taking the seat opposing her; and after some commonplace remark, he waited for her to speak, and this she was not slow to do.

Fixing her bright eyes upon him, she said,—

"Algy Ferrars made a communication to me last night. He said he saw you in friendly converse with this beautiful nobody who is turning all the men's heads. Is that true?"

"If you omit the 'friendly,'" he answered, vexedly, "The lady detests me."

"Poor Nugent," with mock sympathy, "that is a novel experience for you, and does not speak well for the fair one's taste. When and where did you first meet her?"

"I must decline to tell you."

The angry colour flamed into the piquante face.

"Then it must have been in some queer place; and as the girl detests you, it is kind to keep her secret. Can't you trust me, Nugent? you have never yet excluded me from your confidence."

"It is Miss Sinclair's own wish that I should be silent with regard to her past."

"Then she has a past, and it is disgraceful!" Beatrice exclaimed, triumphantly.

"Miss Sinclair is too proud and pure a woman to stoop to sin," he answered.

She started as though he had struck her; then she said,—

"She has bewitched you. I believe, Nugent Anstey, that you love her."

"It would have been happier for me had I done so," sadly.

"And does she know," sneered the irate little coquette, "that you have a wife?"

"Yes, she knows," laconically.

"Look at me; tell me, are you weary of my friendship? Have you grown tired of the woman who all along has loved you?"

"And who proved it by marrying a man she loathed."

"You are brutal, and it is this girl who has made you so. I hate her! I hate her! I almost think I hate you. How can you so forget the past?"

"I have not forgotten, and I know my mad infatuation for you has spoiled all my life, utterly ruined me."

"Say rather that my wisdom made you rich at your wife's expense; and that you have regretted nothing until a younger and fairer face than mine has pleased your fickle fancy."

"Poor Beatrice!" he said, sadly, "perhaps you were not all to blame; at all events we will not quarrel now. I loved you better than you deserved—mine is not an uncommon case. I loved you long after I knew your treachery, but, as Heaven is my witness, I have never forgotten that you were another man's wife since Delap's ring first shone upon your finger. I can only wish we had never met."

"Stop!" she panted, "stop! you kill me. Leave me, get out here, I cannot bear your presence longer. Oh, Nugent! Nugent! when I have got used to this cruel truth, I will write you to come again—if she will let you." And that was how they parted, the man rejoicing in his heart that he had found courage to show her all the truth.

CHAPTER IV.

MRS DELAP drove home in a tumult of feeling. She was supremely wretched, her vanity as well as her so-called love was wounded. She hated Ermyn with a strength which almost frightened herself, and she vowed in her heart this new beauty should not steal her lover from her.

She even forgot for awhile that very mythical wife of Nugent's, whom none of her set had ever seen or known.

And when she had indulged in a wild fit of weeping, and soundly abused her maid for some fancied transgression, she did her utmost to remove the traces of tears, and assume her ordinary manner. Then she sat down and wrote Nugent.

She was always very careful about her correspondence, and although one of the most audacious and successful of flirts never went beyond the bounds of propriety. She was not the woman to lose caste and wealth by any act of her own. So she wrote:—

"DEAR LORD ANSTLEY,—

"Will you call upon me to-morrow noon. I am going to ask a great favour of you. You will call me capricious; but since we spoke of a certain lady I have had reason to change my opinion, and now desire nothing so much as the favour of an introduction. I am sorry to say that I cannot promise you Mr. Delap's society, as he leaves to night for Liverpool. Knowing your kindness, I am bold enough to trespass upon it. Yours very faithfully,

"BEATRICE DELAP."

The note despatched, she rested almost content, feeling assured Nugent would grant the desired interview, and soon a comfortable conviction possessed her mind that she could " lure her tassel gentle back again."

With the next morning she rose paler than usual, but looking perhaps the prettier for her pallor and slight languor, and, having donned the panoply of war, disposed herself in the gracefulst attitude upon a couch. Duly at noon Nugent arrived, looking vexed with himself and the whole world.

Beatrice extended her hand, whilst she lifted her dark eyes to his pathetically.

"I was very naughty yesterday," she said, with a faint little smile, "and quite deserved you should be angry with me, so I sent for you to ask your forgiveness and the boon I mentioned. Surely I cannot atone more suitably for my foolish words and suspicions than by desiring Miss Sinclair for my friend."

"I forgive you," he answered, slowly; "but I have no power to bring about the introduction you desire. My friends are not Miss Sinclair's."

"You mean," said Beatrice, "you have the power but not the will?"

"We will not quibble over words, Mrs. Delap. If you choose to view my refusal in that light I am afraid I cannot convince you of the contrary."

She tried to hold him with her eyes, but he was proof against their power; so she pleaded,—

"Let us be friends again, Nugent. I cannot bear there should be any estrangement between us."

But a man's love once dead does not revive again, and he turned impatiently upon her.

"More than three years ago, Beatrice, you raised an impassable barrier between us. I neither wish nor would attempt to cross it; and if you are able to forget Mr. Delap's existence, I am not."

It was a brutal speech, perhaps; but she deserved it, although she shrank back as though he had struck her, and she caught her breath with a little moan.

Then like a panther she sprang from the couch, and with her head thrown back, her lips, small body quivering, and her eyes aflame she said,—

"You are afraid for me to know Miss Sinclair. You are afraid lest I should confide certain little matters to her which you would have hidden. Such as your peculiar marriage, your utter abandonment of your young wife. You think I am not worthy so much as to exchange word with her; and I believe you lied when you said she knew of your marriage."

She paused for sheer want of breath, she could not even cry out under his look of unmixed contempt.

"I thank you for your gratuitous insults," he said, coldly, "and can only regret that I exposed myself to them by coming here. If you were a man I should know better how to answer you;" and then, turning on his heel, he left her standing white and rigid in the centre of the room. But she did not mean or cry out now.

"I have lost him," was her first thought, and although she had been so long learning it, it came home to her now with a bitter shock. Then suddenly she laughed softly and cruelly, with the red lips drawn tightly over the glittering teeth. "When love is lost there is still revenge," she thought, "and I will make him suffer yet, even as I do! I did not know how cruel it would be to feel he no longer cared."

She was full of self-pity; she who had never had any ruth upon other women—who had made it her chiefest pleasure and aim to steal away their lovers, no matter at what cost to them. But she was too much a woman of the world to air her grievances in public, and so she went abroad as usual, and as usual was attended by her little court of admirers. She and Nugent now only bowed as they passed, and Captain Ferrars was at a loss to account for their chill demeanour, until he saw that whenever the opportunity came Nugent might be seen walking and talking with Ermyn.

"It isn't fair to the girl," he said, confidentially to Beatrice, and she smiled sagely, as he went on: "She ought to know he is a married man—by Jove! I'll tell her myself—or will you? Anstley was always fair and square before, but I'm hanged if he isn't acting like a cad now."

Mrs. Delap shrugged her pretty shoulders.

"He is free to gang his ain gait; don't be Quixotic and take up the cudgels in defence of a mere nobody who has a shameful past!"

"I don't believe it," the Captain said, bluntly. "I beg your pardon, Mrs. Delap, but I am sure you are misinformed."

"Lord Anstley was my informant!"

"Still, I am like Didymus; and if he knows anything against the girl he is a black-

guard to publish it. Oh! don't laugh in that fashion, it isn't like you—you're the kindest little woman under the sun!"

"Thank you; but really, Algy, I am afraid you too are going over to the enemy, and intend deserting me for a new deity. I must be getting pale."

The young fellow laughed out.

"Oh, I say, Mrs. Delap, that is carrying a joke too far. You never will be old; you've got the secret of eternal youth."

"That will do for once; Algy, really you are improving—but at my expense. One more turn and then I will go in; it is getting chilly, and oh! how I hate this place!"

"Then why not leave it?" Mr. Delap would raise no objection.

"I don't think he would," she had almost said "dare"; "but I hate travelling, so I shall stay on a little longer yet."

As they turned from the pier they confronted Nugent and Ermyn: the former, looking a trifle embarrassed, bowed gravely and passed on. Miss Sinclair took not the slightest notice of her rival, and no change was visible on her lovely face.

"You have quarrelled?" she asked of her companion a moment later. "No, stay, I do not ask to know why; probably the estrangement is only temporary."

But she felt strangely restless and depressed as she entered her room; the memory of her wrongs had grown less keen, and her heart had softened much towards the man who now showed her such tender consideration and devotion. Of course she should never love him, she thought, but it was hard to think that his life should be wholly at the mercy of a coquette who smiled on him one week and frowned the next.

"If I could only believe him worthy," she said, sadly; "if only I knew that it is his heart and not the fear of the world's opinion that brings him a suitor to me."

The next day she was surprised by a message, orally given, that a lady wished to see her, and was waiting for her in an ante-chamber; she gave no name, but said she came on business of importance. And with no hint of the truth she went to meet her visitor. She drew back with a slight indignant gesture, as she was confronted by Mrs. Delap, and that lady hastened to say,—

"Forgive my intrusion, Miss Sinclair, I know it must seem unwarrantable, and only cruel necessity would have brought me here. I have much to say to you, and I am afraid I shall give you pain."

Ermyn motioned her to a seat, remaining standing herself, and her quiet dignity made the other's self-imposed task the more difficult.

"I think I am right in supposing that Lord Anstley is your very great admirer?" here she paused for Ermyn to speak, but not one word would she utter. "I am aware that he is your almost 'daily companion.'"

"All this is irrelevant," Ermyn said, coldly.

"I can prove to you it is not," Mrs. Delap answered, eagerly. "My dear Miss Sinclair, I am a woman older than you in years and experience, and cannot bear to see so lovely a girl drift into a hopeless and compromising attachment."

She spoke with a pretty assumption of matronhood, and in the tenderest of tones; but the other, who knew her, was not moved one jot or tittle from her icy demeanour.

"You have spoken too plainly not to say more," she remarked, quietly; "am I to understand that you consider your friend, Lord Anstley, an unfit associate for me?"

The colour flamed high into the riant face, but bent upon having her own sweet revenge, Beatrice answered, temperately,—

"We are not any longer friends, owing solely to his conduct as regards yourself. I reasoned with him, and he was very angry. My dear young lady, if your friends knew the real character of the man, they would refuse to receive him."

"And how long have you known it, madam?"

"I am afraid I have been years learning it; I was so loth to believe evil of the friend of my childhood, and I never guessed that he was less true than he seemed until he heartlessly deserted his poor *fiancée* for his wealthy cousin,—he is a married man, but no one has ever seen his wife."

"I have," answered Ermyrn, with a smile, in which there was a suggestion of humour, "and that is the only bond between Lord Anstey and myself."

Beatrice gasped; this was certainly carrying war into the enemy's camp; but, quickly recovering her self command, she said,—

"But, dear Miss Sinclair, this is a very generous world, and your interest in our mutual friend shall I say?—is liable to misconstruction. If there is not something queer about Lady Nugent, why is she a mere lay figure? Is she beautiful?"

"Men are pleased to say so."

"Then she must be a fool."

"That does not necessarily follow."

"Then if she is both gifted and beautiful why does not her husband acknowledge her? She is a living enigma—if she lives? Has she returned to the nunnery from whence she came?"

"I am not at liberty to tell you so much, it is sufficient for me to say I am as well acquainted with Lady Anstey as with myself; she knows perfectly well that I frequently meet Lord Anstey, she is not unwilling that I should do so."

"Then she must be a very strange woman; evidently she would not throw her husband into such danger if she cared in the least for him. But I can hardly credit your story—forgive me—but long acquaintance with Lord Anstey has made me doubtful of his honour. I do not know what woman he may have imposed upon you as his wife, but I do know that he is an utterly heartless and unprincipled man; that for the sake of wealth he forewore the girl who loved him, and broke her heart in doing so."

The sudden colour flamed into Ermyrn's face; this was too much. What sort of woman was this, who, whilst loving a man, could take away his honour to gratify her lust for conquest? She flashed suddenly upon Beatrice, her grand eyes full of scorn and indignation.

"I would have spared you, Mrs. Delap," she said in swift, low tones; "but you compel me to speak. I know the story of Lord Anstey's unfortunate attachment, of his *fiancée's* treachery, and I know too that you are the Beatrice Clayton who spoiled his life and made his bride one of the wretchedest women on earth!"

Beatrice rose agast. "How—how do you know these things, and who are you?"

"I am the friend of Lady Anstey, and I wonder that you dare come to me with such a shameful story. For the sake of our common sex I will spare you any exposure, but in return I demand that you never by word or sign presume to show any recognition of me; for the rest, I say when you speak of an honourable gentleman, remember his honour and your own goodby," and with those words she swept from the room, her tall figure drawn to its fullest height, her face a little flushed, and her deep eyes indignant.

Beatrice sat alone a moment; then, with an awful sense of defeat, she rose hastily and left the house. Who was this mysterious girl who had power to quell her? How came she in possession of Nugent's secret? And then an angry light shone in her eyes; it was all clear to her. Fearing what she (Beatrice) might do, he had given his new love a garbled story of the affair, and being an unscrupulous girl, she was pleased to accept it for truth. She gave a deep gasp of relief. "I will snatch him from her yet; Algy shall help me—she will believe him, he is so stupidly and palpably honest—and then if she will not listen to him, I will make the whole place ring with Nugent's name and hers!"

She felt more comfortable after arranging

these little matters in her own mind, and away from Ermyrn she lost her sense of defeat and comparative insignificance. She was her usual gentle smiling self when next she met Captain Ferrars; only there was a hint of sadness in her manner, which he was quick to perceive and interrogate upon.

Mrs. Delap cast down her eyes. "Oh, Algy! if only I could trust you. With Mr. Delap so much away, I am so awkwardly placed; then I am so stupid. I need a man to advise me."

And of course, she being a pretty woman, and he a young, unscrupulous fellow, he was flattered by her broadly implied compliment, and answered, "You may confide wholly in me, if you think I can in any way help you."

"Oh! so many thanks. The fact is, Algy, I have made an awful blunder. I went to Miss Sinclair this morning quite eager for her welfare. You know what a silly, sentimental heart I have, and I cannot bear to think that a man should trifle with any girl's affections, especially a man in Lord Anstey's position. So I told her all about him, and—and of the part he played in my past!"

"Oh!" said Algy, after a prolonged whistle, "that was certainly calm; he was not to blame there!"

Beatrice nodded her pretty head sagely, and with a little sigh she said, "How ready you are to misjudge me! You are really my friend, or I would not tell the truth even to you. The world called me mercenary when I married Mr. Delap, but I was mad. Mad with outraged love and pride; it was not I who sinned, although I bore the blame, and even held my peace to him. There was another woman he loved—a low born sweetheart, who took the first place in his heart; and learning this I married Mr. Delap—because I knew him for an honourable man!"

He looked doubtfully at her, but her face was as innocent as a child's; her pretty eyes were full of pathos, as she added, "Oh, I have suffered so much because of him; I have tried to save him from worse evil—because once I loved him; I have borne slights and even my husband's anger for his sake, and the valued sneers of a bitter world; and I would fain save that lovely girl from a like fate. If you tell her my story, she will trust you!"

"It is a hateful task; but," said his doubts of her vanished, "I will undertake it for your sake—because you are one of the noblest of women."

And up in her own room Ermyrn laughed softly and happily to herself. "How strange, she mused, that I should take up cudgels in my husband's defence! why should I? and against that woman? Do I care for him a little? Yes!—and

"This bud of love, by summer's ripening breath
May prove a beautiful flower when next we meet."

CHAPTER V.

AWAY from the little town stood two people, Lord Anstey and the reputed Miss Sinclair; his face was pale and half fierce with emotion, hers one could not see, partly because it was drooped so low, partly because of the broad hat shading it. Nugent was speaking earnestly.

"Do not you now believe I love you?"

"I wish to believe. I try to believe, but sometimes it is very hard to keep faith. Not so long ago, oh! not so very long ago, you swore the same vows to her, and I have read that to each soul is granted only one love."

"And I give you the purest of my heart, not the first reckless passion of early, unthinking youth, but the best fruits of my manhood. Oh! wife! my wife, bid me hope—let me think that soon you and I will clasp hands as united lovers in very deed and truth."

Ermyrn was shaken beyond all self-control.

"Do not urge me now; have compassion on

my weakness and my womanhood. You draw my heart to you, but I must have time for thought. There must be no second mistake, for that would be worse than all. Give me three days at least—it is not much I ask—and then if my conscience tells me it is right that I should do this thing, if my heart still pleads for you, I will hold out no longer."

It was unfortunate that her last sentence should reach the ears of honest, blundering Algy Ferrars, who had been loitering near the couple, unaware of their pretence; it was unfortunate, too, that an innate sense of honour prevented him remaining for Nugent's reply.

"You will hold out a hope that soon I may make known my beloved wife to all the world, and show by my devotion to you, that I and I alone have been blameworthy? Ermyrn, Ermyrn! will you kiss me in the token of good faith?"

She held back a moment—remember her life's experience had not taught her much confidence in men or women—then slowly she lifted her perfect mouth to his, and kissed him once. Just as slowly and softly she said,—

"Now may Heaven grant I may not repent my kiss, or you your prayer. In three days from this I will give you my answer, and oh! may I be guided aright." Then through the grey fast gathering mist she slowly melted and he did not seek to follow her, knowing instinctively that in silence and solitude her heart would best plead for him. He went home like one exalted above all mundane things. Ermyrn loved him, or was very near to doing so, and he—well as he lifted his handsome face skywards the thought, "I don't deserve her, but I will try to; with Heaven's help I will make ample atonement for the past! And, thank Heaven, I can go to her with an unspotted name, my queen and my wife."

He found now that his passion for Beatrice compared with his love for Ermyrn was as "moonlight unto sunlight, and as water unto wine;" and deep in his heart he knew that if Ermyrn refused to hear his prayer, life was practically over for him.

Meanwhile the maiden wife hurried to her lodgings in a state of excitement she herself could hardly understand. "I love him—do I love him?" she questioned of herself. "If I love him can I be unselfish enough to consider first his ultimate good, putting all my hopes and wishes aside? Nugent! Nugent! for your sake may Heaven direct me aright."

She was not so pleased when Cherry met her at the door with an announcement that Captain Ferrars was waiting for her. She had wished to steal away and hug that newborn joy close to her heart—and then it was such an unusual time for a call! As she stood face to face with him she realised in one quick and fearsome minute that what he had to say closely concerned her future and perhaps Nugent's. But she was strong to hide her emotion as with a smile she tendered her hand. The young man took and held it in a kindly pressure. He believed she was on the verge of a dreadful crime, but he believed, too, that her temptation was strong, and he meant to save her, if possible, from herself. His very delicacy of mind and nature prevented him speaking the whole truth—poor Algy! who meant to do so much good and wrought so much evil.

"Miss Sinclair," he stammered, "I come upon the painful errand. Quite inadvertently I overheard a portion of your conversation with Lord Anstey; and—and—oh, by Jove! how hard it is to tell you!—for your own sake I beg and pray you not to listen to the most unprincipled scoundrel under the sun. I have no motive in saying this except to save you from certain misery."

She snatched her hand from his. All the light and colour had gone from her face as she sank into a chair, and said, sharply,—

"Why do you come to me thus? Did Mrs. Delap send you? You are her friend; are you her emissary?"

"No; although, indeed, she begged me to

see you. She is a woman harshly judged. I, myself, once wronged her in thought. She married Delap, being mad with outraged love. She learned that her *fiancé* was carrying on a low intrigue with some woman even whilst he professed to, and possibly did, love her. And then in her anger she cast him aside, allowing the world to think evil of her that he might go free; and he would not clear her from any aspersion. Above all, Miss Sinclair, you must remember that as yet his wife is neither dead nor divorced."

In her doubt and agony Ermyn could scarcely refrain from bitter laughter, that these two who sought to save her were so truly ignorant of her relation towards Nugent. But with an iron effort she controlled herself, and asked,—

"What proofs can you give me that your story is true?"

"Anyone can tell you Lord Anstey married his cousin Ermyntrude Mary Anstey; that after the marriage they at once separated, none knows why. It may be that she, like Beatrice Delap, had learned the truth. My only other proof is a certain letter written by his low-born love less than a week ago. I have it here; will you see it?"

"No, no, no!" shudderingly, "why should I? I accept your word as that of an Englishman and a soldier."

She did not even ask how it had fallen into his hands. He was glad she would not so much as glance at the ill-written, ill-spelt letter, a clever forgery of Mrs. Delap's, who said she had found it on the stairs after Nugent had left, and had taken care of it "just to convince that poor child of her madness"; but she rose pale and stern.

"You do not know from what you have saved me," she said, in a strange voice; "and I never can be sufficiently grateful to you. I think there is no more to say except—except—" her voice faltered her utterly a moment, then she went on bravely: "Perhaps you have been thinking hard things of me which I do not deserve. Will you try to remember that I have been a woman cruelly wronged, and that I have not deserved my calamity."

He would have assured her of his perfect belief in her, his profound sympathy with her; but something in her attitude and expression stayed his words.

"You will leave me, please," she said, presently; "and though I shall always remember you with gratitude, I hope we shall never meet again—that would be too painful for either."

With a few jumbled words he took his leave, and then Ermyntrude fell prone to the floor, weeping wildly, for "the bad of love" had proved "a besutious flower;" and she knew that, all unworthy as he was, Nugent held the first, best place in her heart. Oh, the shame and sorrow of it!

Not for a moment had she given credence to Beatrice; but she could not doubt Algé Ferrars—his face bore index to his character. And even Beatrice had been wronged; perhaps Nugent's sin had made her what she was. And then she rose, and her eyes were wild.

"Never, never, never will I see him any more!" she said in a harsh voice. "I would scorn to touch his hand or bear his name; and yet—yet! Oh, Heaven, have mercy upon me! He is my husband, and I love him!"

She went to Cherry.

"Get ready to leave to-morrow. Never mind about asking Mrs. Sinclair's permission. I am my own mistress now."

"But, Miss Ermyn," pleaded Cherry, "I thought you and my lord were getting to understand each other so nicely?"

"That is all over. Do as I bid you," answered her mistress, so fiercely, that Cherry stood aghast; and many a tear did she shed over her packing. But in the morning they had left Weston-under-Mare behind, and Ermyn's note was in Nugent's keeping. It ran thus,—

"It is too hard to forget or forgive. By Heaven's grace I will see you no more!"

He sat staring at it with blank eyes. What could it mean? Only last night she had been kind and tender; she had confessed that her heart was drawn to him, she had kissed him, and prayed that she might make a right choice. Was this, then, the answer to her prayer? Oh! how cruel, good women can be!

And then remembering how she had looked as she spoke her farewell words, and how infinitely gentle had been her voice, he brought his fist down upon the table with a mighty blow. "By Heaven! other influence has been at work; of herself Ermyn could never have done this thing! Beatrice is at the bottom of it all, and this is her revenge. Will the results of my early folly never be ended?"

He rose hurriedly, with the intention of going to Mrs. Delap, but he changed his purpose, and hastened first to the Sinclairs, to be met with the information that the Professor and his wife had left just an hour after Miss Sinclair and her maid.

They were en route for home, but Miss Sinclair said nothing as to her destination, and her belongings were left in charge of Mrs. Sinclair, who was very resentful about her actions.

Gone!—wholly gone! leaving no trace behind her. Lost to him now and for ever!—now, when he had learned his own utter need of her.

Strong man as he was, he staggered under the blow; it was so unexpected, and so bitter. The landlady, struck by the keen anguish on his face, asked kindly if she could assist him in any way.

He never heard her words, he never saw the pity in her eyes as he turned away blind and mad with the horror of what lay before him. And whilst thus dazed and stupid he brushed by a little lady, elegantly dressed.

She veered swiftly round, and said, in so low a voice he did not hear,—

"Nugent!"

But she was not lightly to be ignored, so following, she laid her little ungloved hand upon his arm, asking, "Is it thus you pass old friends?"

A sudden fury darkened his face, as his wild eyes rested upon her.

"Woman!" he said through his set teeth, "what have you done to her? What fiendish treachery have you used to bring about this thing?"

She had never seen him thus, never felt so merciless a grip upon her tender flesh, and she was frightened.

"Tell me what you mean?" she gasped. "And loose my arm, you are hurting me cruelly. Pray do not make a scene here!"

He let her go with a gesture of repulsion.

"What do I mean? Why, that she has gone, leaving no clue or trace behind her; and I believe that you were instrumental in bringing about her departure, that your treachery has come between us. There is murder in my heart."

But Beatrice had now recovered herself.

"Pray be calm," she said, playfully. "I know nothing of what has occurred; but I gather from your cruel words that Miss Sinclair has gone. If that is so, it is well done."

"Will you swear to me," he demanded, "on your honour that your hands are clear of this thing?"

She cast back her head, and with her clear eyes looking fully into his, lied to him boldly,—

"I know nothing of Miss Sinclair or her movements; but I am glad she has taken this course, because, my poor Nugent, you had never any right to seek her—remember your wife!"

"She is my wife!"

Beatrice Delap stared at him as though she thought his love had driven him mad; then, as slowly conviction stole upon her, her face blanched at the thought of all her fruitless intrigues, of her own defeat, and she seemed about to faint.

"Your wife!" she echoed, in a dreadful voice, and could say no more.

"Yes; perhaps I should have told you that before, but she forbade it. She had not much cause to be proud of her bargain, but she was learning to love me—I'll swear she was; and now, could I find who has done me this ill-turn, I would crush him as I would a fly."

Beatrice crept a little nearer.

"Are you quite sure she is gone?"

"As sure as I am of my own identity."

"She could not have loved you very dearly if she could leave you thus."

"You are not a competent judge," he answered, his anguish making him brutal. "You would never understand her great and noble nature, though you lived in daily communion with her a thousand years."

Beatrice winced, this was plain speaking with a vengeance; but she would show no resentment.

"All this is very sad," she said, with just the right touch of sympathy. "You must let me try to help you. I believe I am not utterly stupid."

He did not answer, he only looked at her vaguely, and then, without a word, he turned away, wholly unconscious of his discourtesy; and the woman who had wronged him, who loved him infinitely more now that he was lost to her than ever she had done before, stood watching him with miserable eyes.

If by chance he and Ermyn should meet! If she should tell him all the truth! The thought of his righteous scorn, and anger made her grow sick and faint; but she was not remorseful yet. She was only wretched because her plans had failed, and because she now knew the woman she hated was his most beloved wife, lovelier than ever she herself had been, proud, pure, and gifted.

No wonder that Mrs. Delap was *triste* through all that long hot day! Neither was she happier when she heard from Algé that Nugent had left just as suddenly as Ermyn had done; only he had gone openly to London to consult his solicitor on important business, so Algé said.

Poor Nugent! He was not bent now upon finding his wife. For some grave reason she had refused his love; well, he deserved it; and in his despair he struggled no more against his fate. He went straight to his solicitor, much astonishing him by the strange plans he unfolded to him.

"For my sake and for my fault," he said, "Lady Anstey went into voluntary exile, leaving me in almost sole possession of her fortune and estates. Now, because all reconciliation is impossible I will make what reparation is in my power. I have been her debtor too long. I freely resign all claim to the property in her favour. Out of her fortune my creditors were satisfied, with my own patrimony I would cancel my debt to her!"

"But, my lord, that would leave you penniless for years; this is suicidal. What on earth do you intend to do?"

"I have laid my plans," said Nugent, with a dreary smile, "and I was always obstinate. You have nothing to do but draw up the deeds; and to deliver this letter into Professor Sinclair's hands. He will know where to find Lady Anstey, and will see that it reaches her. No, not another word; I have made my resolve."

And when he went out of that office he was shorn of all his worldly goods; beside a sum of twenty pounds he had nothing in the world; but he was happier in that thought than he could have been had he remained his obdurate wife's debtor.

His letter reached Ermyn three days later, as she sat alone in her apartment in a Madrid hotel. It almost broke her heart to read it.

"MY BELOVED WIFE,—

"In making what reparation I can for all the past, I feel I am but doing my duty. I am going into exile, following your example,

and if I dare ask any favour of you, it is that you will return to your own and Littlemanor; nothing can hurt me more than your refusal to do so. If you could have forgiven, I should have been a better as well as happier man; but you know best, and I have no complaint to make; I deserve it all. I shall think of you always with love and reverence, and, unknown to you, shall keep myself apprised so far as I can of all that befalls you. If ever I learn you need my help, then and then only will I discover myself, only to be effaced again when you need me no longer. Forgive me, if you can; forget me, if to forget me is to be happy. Heaven's blessings be yours, and may Heaven in its mercy remove me from your life.

"NUGENT."

He was guilty—ah! he had not denied one charge brought against him, and yet Ermyn's heart cried wildly for its love. She lavished huge sums of money in a vain attempt to find him; and when a year had gone by, broken-spiritedly she returned to Littlemanor, solely because he had wished it.

CHAPTER VI.

MRS. DELAP, a widow, still on the sunny side of thirty, and still powerful to attract, drove through the crowded streets with an air of utter boredom. There were dark shadows beneath her eyes, and the infantile mouth had taken a look of grief which her foes were far from ascribing to loss of her husband.

Nothing had gone well with her, with the exception of money matters, since last August, when she lied away Ermyn's growing trust and love, and ruthlessly trampled all hope from Nugent's heart. Perhaps she was thinking of these things as she sat clad in her weeds in the elegantly appointed landau she had never suffered the "late lamented" to enter. Certainly Nugent Anstey was not absent from her mind, and she wondered miserably where he had hidden himself, for he had disappeared as completely as though the earth had opened and swallowed him. Then, by one of those strange chances which are little less than miracles, she lifted her eyes, and lo! he was before her, but habited in the garb of a porter, and carrying a huge basket of goods; but the vision of love is keen, and she knew him for all his hideous disguise and worn aged face.

With one swift movement she had sprung from the landau, thinking then of none but Nugent, and as swiftly she cried his name aloud. He turned like a stag driven to bay, saw her, knew that his secret had passed from him; and then, whether her cry had frightened the horses, whether he had turned too late to flee, neither could ever tell. But all in a moment there was the clang of hoofs, the terrified shrieks of women, and then, as the animals rushed from the scene, they saw that the porter lay with his white face turned upwards, and the blood streaming from his brow. Beatrice dropped on her knees in the muddy road beside him.

"He is not dead! Oh, say he is not dead!" she cried; then strong, kindly arms raised her, and a man's voice, answered,—

"We hope not, madam; but we had best remove him at once to St. George's."

"No, no! he must come to my house, and you will come with us. I remember you, Dr. Marshall, although you have forgotten me—and—and I knew him in happier days," pointing with shaking finger towards Nugent.

Privately Dr. Marshall thought the lady Quixotic in the extreme, but he raised no further protest, and, having accompanied her to her home, proceeded to make his examination. Later, with a grave face, he told her that if the man had any friends she had best send for them.

(Continued on page 453.)

HILDRED ELSINORE.

CHAPTER XIII.

NAN ROBSON mended apace. It really seemed as though from the moment her lover answered her call and she beheld him safe and well at her side, her progress was quick and steady. There were no fluctuations, no complications in her case.

Her mother declared triumphantly that "Mr. Maitland had saved her life;" and though neither Dr. Tucker nor his young partner approved of Claude Maitland's strange conduct, they could not deny that his opportune arrival had seemingly called Nan back from the gates of death.

The two men rarely spoke of the matter to each other—they knew they differed on the subject. John Filar stuck to it that Claude Maitland was a scoundrel, and any true-hearted girl had better be dead than at his mercy; but the senior partner did not go as far as this. He could not approve of the young man's abrupt departure in August; he was not quite sure he believed in the story of the rich uncle and the forced voyage in the yacht; but he credited Maitland with an honest devotion to Nan Robson, and thought he would make her happy, keeping the seamy side of his life, if there was one, hidden away from her.

One fact was indisputable: whether from his "uncle" or other sources, Mr. Maitland possessed an ample command of money. Anything Nan could wish for, all that could in any way forward her recovery, was supplied with a lavish hand.

Her lover did not occupy his old rooms in Delaporte-road, but stayed at a West End hotel, coming every day to spend some hours with his fiancée, and never arriving empty handed.

Besides this he had had a business talk with Mrs. Robson, when he asked if an allowance of two hundred a year would enable her to give up dress-making and lodgers?

The widow declared it was too much—less would suffice; but Claude Maitland replied he did not wish her to be straitened, and he forthwith paid two hundred pounds into the local bank, where—for the sake of cashing her dividend warrants—she kept a slender account.

In the face of this generosity, Mrs. Robson could not be expected to share the very serious doubts Dr. Tucker showed of her future son-in-law.

"Sure, sir," she said, when the doctor tried to warn her that she had absolutely no proof of Claude Maitland's story, "he's that wrapped up in Nan, it's beautiful to see him; and the presents he brings her are fit for a countess. He loves my girl, he's plenty of money, and he doesn't drink; and, I'm sure, if that's not enough for happiness, I can't tell what is."

Remembering the widow's own history, and all she had suffered from her husband's drinking propensities and poverty, it was easy to understand that the qualities she had mentioned seemed to her those most to be desired in a partner for life.

Dr. Tucker expressed a wish to make Mr. Maitland's acquaintance, and Mrs. Robson seemed eager to make the introduction; but after mentioning it to her son-in-law elocut, she told Dr. Tucker, frankly, he had utterly declined to meet her kind friend. He was conscious, she said, his sudden departure in August, and his equally abrupt return might prejudice strangers against him; and as he did not feel called upon to explain either to outsiders, he would prefer not to meet Dr. Tucker.

"I know it sounds ungrateful," said Mrs. Robson, apologetically, "but you see, doctor, he always was odd. Folks who spend all their time scribbling aren't just like other people, you see."

Privately, Dr. Tucker was not surprised. He had never expected cordiality from Claude Maitland; he had been prepared for a carefully made appointment broken with plausible excuses at the last moment. The point-blank refusal of the introduction seemed to him honest of the two.

"You see, sir," went on Mrs. Robson, nervously, "he knows you went down to Mr. Bartram for his address, and he says you'd sure to hear ill tales of him at Tempest Mere, for his old friend has turned against him, and can't speak badly enough of him."

"And the wedding is to be soon?"

"Next week, sir, and then he'll take her to Hastings, and stay with her till he's obliged to join his uncle, and then I'm to go and keep her company. He's given up the idea of taking her yachting, he says she's not strong enough for it."

"And he still means to have a special license, I suppose?"

"He did mean it, sir; but as Nan's so wonderfully better, and St. Ursula's is so near he was saying yesterday perhaps an ordinary one would do, for Nan has a fancy for being married in church like other folk."

Dr. Tucker asked Nan, frankly that day whether she was happy. There was no mistaking the answer of her beautiful eyes. They were full of love-light as she said,—

"Oh! so happy, sir. It seems just like some beautiful dream. You see, I thought he was dead and gone, I never dreamed he would come back to me like this."

"Your mother seems quite satisfied with your prospects," said the doctor, kindly, "she has quite taken to Mr. Maitland."

"Yes, that is best of all. I was always afraid they wouldn't understand each other. Poor mother has seen so much trouble, you know, doctor, and it makes her suspicious; but I think she believes in Claude now nearly as much as I do."

Two days later Dr. Tucker met Mrs. May a few doors from the Vicarage, and stopped to speak to her.

"Why were you not at the wedding?" she asked, pleasantly. "I made sure you would be asked to give Nan away."

He started.

"You don't mean Nan Robson is married? Why, her mother told me it was to be next week."

"Last night as we were at supper Mr. Maitland's card was brought to my husband, and a message, could he see him for a moment on private business. The Vicar was very much taken with him. It seems the old uncle is growing angry at being left so long, and declares his nephew must join him in a week, so Mr. Maitland wanted to be married this morning that he might have a few days honeymoon before he had to leave his wife. He apologised for the short notice, and asked if the ceremony could be this morning, directly after the eight o'clock service. Of course my husband agreed, and they were married at half-past eight to day. Mrs. Robson and I were the only witnesses, and the bridal pair drove off in a cab. I never saw any one look so radiantly happy as little Nan, and her mother seemed perfectly satisfied with her prospects."

Dr. Tucker looked keenly at the lady—they were old friends—and asked,—

"What did you think of the bridegroom?"

"I—," she hesitated, "Well, the Vicar says he is charming, and certainly he was most liberal with fees—a bank note, if you please—but—he never looks one in the face, and he seemed in a nervous terror all the time of the ceremony. I began to fancy he had a wife hidden away somewhere or other, and was afraid of her arriving on the scene."

It was just as Mrs. May had said. The wedding had been celebrated directly after the short morning service, and Mr. and Mrs. Maitland found themselves in London soon after nine o'clock. They breakfasted at the restaurant adjoining the railway station; here

a telegram was handed to Claude which seemed to cause him great concern.

"Shall you be very disappointed, Nan, if we can't go to Hastings after all?"

"Way, no," she said, cheerfully. "I don't mind where we go, Claude, so long as we are together."

Mr. Maitland explained his uncle had telegraphed, asking them both to meet him at Dover; and as the old gentleman was very flighty and easily offended, it might be a ploy to go against his wishes.

Nan, who was the most trustful of wives, only thought it a fortunate coincidence that they were just in time to catch the express to Dover. Nor did she notice that their luggage, by some marvellous foresight, had been labelled for the latter place.

Of course they travelled luxuriously, a first-class carriage being reserved for them; money was evidently no object to Claude Maitland nowadays.

He drew a breath of relief when they had left Cannon street, and knew that for nearly two hours they would be undisturbed. He took his wife's thin white hand in his, and asked, tenderly,—

"Are you happy, sweetheart?"

"Perfectly, dear! Oh, Claude, it seems like some beautiful, wonderful dream. Only fancy, three weeks ago I believed I should never see you again."

"And were fading out of life yourself in consequence," he said, fondly. "Nan, if ever I disappoint you, dear, don't regret that I came back to you—don't wish that I had come too late."

"I couldn't," she answered, faintly. "Why, Claude, life seemed not worth having when I thought you were dead; and, oh! how I hated Mr. Bertram, I believed he had killed you."

"He would like to!" muttered Claude under his breath; but aloud he said, gravely, "Nan, I want you to promise me one thing. Don't let us ever speak of that man, his very name is painful to me. He is connected with the most terrible episodes of my life. As you love me, dearest, do not let us talk of Bertram!"

She agreed at once. What was there she would not have agreed to for his dear sake?

"How surprised mother will be when she hears we have not gone to Hastings?" said Nan, suddenly.

"You must write to her to-night," said Mr. Maitland, cheerfully. "I don't want her to think I have spirited you away."

"What a lovely day it is!" cried Nan; "who would think this was the proverbial, dull, gloomy November! I don't want to be superstitious, but, Claude, I can't help feeling glad our wedding-day is fine."

"I hope the sea is calm," said Mr. Maitland, thoughtfully, "or my uncle will have a bad passage."

"Isn't it rather late in the year for yachting?" asked Nan.

"Yes; but he always clings to it as long as he possibly can. Poor old man, he is never happy on shore; but in a week or two he will have to make tracks for Madeira, or some other warm place, and settle there for the winter."

They were evidently expected at the hotel. Maitland told his wife directly he received his uncle's telegram he had "wired" to secure rooms. The hotel proprietor might have told a different story, but Nan recked nothing of that. She was as happy as a child, and only dreaded the introduction to old Mr. Maitland which must take place soon. Claude's uncle, however, seemed to be the most changeable of mortals. The morning brought another telegram. There had been an accident to his yacht, and he had been obliged to put up at the Hotel des Bains at St. Madeleine, where he hoped they would join him.

Nan's geography was not of the modern order, and did not include a minute acquaintance with French watering places; but Claude assured her St. Madeleine was a charming winter resort on the shores of the Mediterranean,

and that the place would be sure to do her no end of good, and the idea of visiting a foreign land was pleasant to the girl who had seen so little of the world beyond a London suburb. So after a day at Dover, to rest after her journey, they crossed to Calais, and then made their way by easy stages to the South of France, pausing at every place which seemed worth visiting, and travelling in the most comfortable and leisurely fashion, until Nan began to think old Mr. Maitland would surely be tired of expecting them.

There was one drawback to her bliss; only one, but that was no trifle. Their wanderings had been so uncertain she had been unable to hear from her mother. She had written to Mrs. Robson several times, but never in any letter had she been sufficiently certain of their next halting-place to give an address.

It was a week after that strange, lonely wedding that Mr. and Mrs. Claude Maitland found themselves at last at St. Madeleine. Here a charming maisonette had been prepared for their reception, and two neatly-dressed French servants, had everything in readiness for their temporary employers.

"Do you like it, Nan?" asked her husband, as he drew her out on to the pleasant flower-scented balcony where they could see the blue waters of the tideless sea. "Darling, do you think you can be happy here with me?"

"It looks like Paradise," said Nan. "Oh, Claude, how kind of your uncle to get this lovely place ready for us. Is he here? I am quite anxious to see him and thank him."

But the wandering old man was not at St. Madeleine. After getting everything prepared for his children's reception he had wearied of the pretty little village and gone back to Paris.

Nan heard this with a sigh. She began to fancy Mr. Maitland, senior, was something like a living will-of-the-wisp, whom they might spend their lives in pursuing and never overtake.

"Oh, Claude, shall we have to start again after your uncle? This is such a lovely place I should like to have stayed here a little while."

"You shall stay here till you are tired of it, Nan," he answered, warmly. "My uncle is eccentric, but I can't have my wife worn out with tramping after his vagaries. You and I will settle down here, Nan, and play at housekeeping."

"And I may write to mother and give her an address at last."

Claude Maitland wrote also. He believed Mrs. Robson to be a shrewd business-like woman, who would understand his need to study his uncle's whims better than his wife could do. He told his mother-in-law he had brought Nan to this far-off French village because Mr. Maitland had asked them to join him there.

It was such a lovely spot, and the mild climate would be so good for his darling after her recent illness that he felt disposed to stay for the six months for which his uncle had taken the maisonette. He had not the slightest wish to separate her from her child. Would she come out to St. Madeleine and be their guest?

Nan would be delighted, and he himself should be grateful, as from time to time he might be obliged to devote a few days to his uncle, and he shrank from the idea of leaving his wife alone.

Mrs. Robson showed the letter to Dr. Tucker.

"I always have said, sir, young married folk were best left to themselves, and I've always hoped never to leave old England; but then it's true what Mr. Maitland says—he'll have to dance attendance on his uncle; and Nan, she's no more fit to take care of herself; than a baby, so I think I shall have to go."

"I think you ought to go," said the doctor, a little gravely. "St. Madeleine is an obscure French village, where there are probably no English, and your daughter would be sadly lonely in her husband's absence. But, Mrs.

Robson, you ought to persuade your son-in-law to try to earn a competency for himself, it's weary work depending on rich relations."

"I'm glad you think I ought to go," said Mrs. Robson, wiping her eyes; "though I'd be far happier here in my own little house. I don't doubt Nan's made a grand match, and is a lucky girl; but I'd have liked it better if she'd married a small tradesman or a city clerk, and settled down somewhere near me."

"We cannot choose these things," said the doctor, kindly. "If you really make up your mind to go I'll find out all I can about the trains for you. I expect it'll be a tedious journey at the best."

He was as good as his word. Mrs. Robson always said she never could have got to St. Madeleine without his help; but even with it the journey to the extreme south of France was sufficiently perplexing to a woman who had never been out of England in her life, and for years had never gone beyond a twelve mile radius of Charing-cross.

She knew not a word of French, and had a rooted distrust of all foreigners; but all's well that end's well, and Mrs. Robson did get to St. Madeleine at last. Weary, travel stained, and just a little cross, she stepped on to the platform late one December afternoon; to be met by Nan, looking a vision of health and beauty, in a costume of chestnut velvet trimmed with fur.

"Mother! Oh, mother!"

"Well, to be sure!" cried Mrs. Robson, approvingly; "you look just like a princess, child, and as bonny as before your illness. This must be a fine place for sick folks, though it's uncommonly hard to get to."

"It was so good of you to come, Claude said, I was to thank you from him. He did so hope you would be comfortable!"

"Isn't he at home," asked the mother, struck by the past tense.

"He started this morning for Paris. His uncle sent for him, it's my belief, mother," said Nan, a little rebelliously. "Old Mr. Maitland thinks Claude is bound to rush after him to the end of the world if he does but lift up his little finger!"

"Well, child, the old gentleman's liberal enough," said the ex-landlady, as she took her seat beside Nan in the rather antiquated voiture which plied for hire at the station; "and I suppose he's a right to look for some return."

They drove slowly through the winding lanes, beautiful even in December, and Nan pointed out to her mother the quaint old church, the promenade by the sea, and the one or two little shops in the narrow village street.

"Isn't it a lovely spot, mother?"

Mrs. Robson heaved something like a sigh. "If it makes you strong, dear, and you're happy here, I shall not be the one to fidget with it; but to my mind it's nothing like so convenient as Falmouth; and if you must have the sea to look at, why, Margate would be much more cheerful, and far easier to get at."

Nan smiled; she and her mother were very fond of each other, but they had never looked at things in the same way.

Mrs. Robson praised the maisonette as much as her daughter could desire, and was delighted to find that one of the neat-handed maids could speak and understand a little English, having been waitress at an hotel much patronized by tourists at Cannes. To be sure Marie required you to speak about as slowly as a funeral march, and her limited English vocabulary had a strong French accent, but, as the visitor told Nan, it was something not to have to fall back upon signs.

Nan's own French had improved since she came to St. Madeleine, but it was still slow and halting. She spoke correctly; but always had to translate her thoughts laboriously from English. She made her wishes known to the servants easily enough; but she would have been incapable of carrying on a long conversation on varied subjects with anyone of her own class. She was reading French

books assiduously with the help of a dictionary, and trying hard to improve herself in other ways.

"You know we shall have to live in England after a while, mother, and some day Claude will be a very distinguished person, and I should not like him to be ashamed of his wife!"

Mrs. Robson looked at the girl anxiously. To her mother's eyes Nan was perfect; it was no fear on that score which brought the tears there. Only, looking at the young wife in all the glow of her bridal happiness, a dim foreboding seized on the widow. What did she know, after all, of the man to whom she had confided her treasure?

If Claude Maitland proved unworthy of the trust reposed in him, it would be Nan's death-blow. Some women can survive the fading of an ideal; some can gather up the crumbs left from the wreck of their dreams, and be happy still; others throw themselves into a vortex of dissipation, and try to forget; but a few, with hearts too true and trusting for this lower world, just sink under the awakening—and die.

CHAPTER XIV.

HOWEVER sympathetic one may be by nature, it is well-nigh impossible to feel as much for trials we do not witness as for those we see and share.

Hildred Elinore had never forgotten her family during her three months' happy visit to her aunt Beatie; but when she returned to Little Netherton it seemed to her she had never realized the terrible straits of their daily life. The grinding poverty, the ceaseless effort to make both ends meet appealed to her with new force after those weeks of ease and plenty in Daffodil-road.

The home coming was not propitious, poor child. She thought afterwards that first day was an omen of what was to follow. It was five o'clock when she reached the rural station, which, distant though it was, yet formed the nearest railway communication with Little Netherton.

Hildred alighted quickly, and looked eagerly round for some familiar face. Surely someone had come to meet her. There was nothing snobbish or calculating about the girl; she would have welcomed her little sisters in their shabby frocks; only her heart cried out eagerly for a word of greeting—and there was no one.

No other passengers had stopped at Rusholme, so when the train had gone out the whole attention of the combined porter and station-master was at Hildred's service. She knew him well, for it was Mrs. Elinore's custom to go into market at the next town, and she always treated herself to two penny-worth of train on these occasions. Ever since Hildred could remember it had been a common thing for her or her sisters to walk up to Rusholme to meet mother and help carry her parcels.

"Is there no one to meet me, Mr. Ward?"

"No, that there ain't, missie. Did they expect you by this train?"

"Yes." See looked wistfully at the kindly face. "Of course I can walk home, but there is my luggage."

John Ward looked at it rather critically. "Your mother was here yesterday, Missie. She said you'd be here some time to-day, and I was to tell you to send on your box by the carrier, but he's past now and you'd have to wait till to-morrow afternoon for the things."

"I can carry my bag," said Hildred, bravely; "but I'll leave the box if you will be kind enough to give it to the carrier to-morrow."

It was nearly four miles to Little Netherton and Hildred was tired with travelling, and faint from want of food, for in the hurry at changing carriages the basket of dinner her aunt had given her had been left behind.

The bag was heavy and the air hot and

oppressive with the promise of a storm. Wearily the poor girl trudged on, and she could not help thinking as her family wanted her so little, they might as well have left her with her aunt.

She had gone little more than a mile when the storm broke. The rain came down in a pelting shower, as though the sky was one vast reservoir of which the plug had suddenly been removed, while peals of distant thunder sounded in her ears. She was so tired she would gladly have sat down by the road-side to rest, and it seemed to her she should never reach the welcome sight of the old church tower.

"Hi! Who's there? Miss Hildred, it can't be you!"

It was still raining, though the violence of the storm had spent itself. Looking in the direction of the voice, Hildred saw Mr. Gibson's gig, and the farmer himself, well-protected by his mackintosh, driving.

"Jump up," he cried, heartily. "Why, you're not fit to walk four miles in the heat of weather, much less when you're soaked through."

Hildred accepted gratefully. "If you will take me as far as the farm, Mr. Gibson, I can manage easily to walk home from there."

"Not a bit of it," said the farmer, cheerfully. "You just come to the farm and have some tea and get dry, and I'll take you home afterwards. You'll be too late for tea at the Rectory, and you look done up."

She was almost ready to cry at the kindly words, and Farmer Gibson felt indignant with Mrs. Elinore for letting her come home unmet and unwelcomed.

"The missie'll be real glad to see you, Miss Hildred, and—you won't meet anyone else. David's gone to Australia."

"To Australia!"

"Yes, and you're not to go blaming yourself for what's past and gone. I'll do him a lot of good to see the world a bit, and his mother and I both feel it was better for our boy to have a sharpish blow now than to mate with a wife who had no heart to give him."

"But what's become of the farm?"

"His brother's looking after it. Jim's engaged now to Annie Lawson one of the nicest girls in the parish, and I've a notion they'll be married before the year's out."

Annie Lawson was very nice. A farmer's only daughter, thoroughly domesticated, but yet with a superior education and bright, intelligent ways, Hildred congratulated her old friend warmly.

"We were a bit surprised when we heard you were coming home," remarked Mr. Gibson. "Did you get tired of London ways?"

"Uncle and aunt wanted to keep me always," said Hildred; "they thought as father had nine daughters he might spare them one, but mother said it was not fair to the others."

The farmer flicked his whip rather aimlessly about the leafless hedge. He had something to say, but, not being used to much talking, he did not know how to begin, and he was afraid of frightening Hildred.

"I'm glad you're back," he said, at last; "parson hasn't looked the right thing at all lately, and I'm thinking he's missed you."

"Do you think he's ill, Mr. Gibson?"

"Oh dear, no." The farmer hesitated more than ever. "Times have been very bad, you see, Miss Hildred, and I'm thinking the illness in the spring was a great expense to him."

Hildred looked frankly into the farmer's face.

"Do you mean he's troubled about money, Mr. Gibson? He always is, you know."

"I'm afraid, my dear, he's taken the wrong way out of it. He's said nothing to me. He was always a silent man; but it's whispered about he's given a bill to someone in the town in return for a small advance of money, and that now the time's come to pay it back he's in a fix."

Hildred looked white as death.

"Is it true?"

"I'm afraid so. Now, Miss Hildred, parson and I've been neighbours for many years, and I'm a sharper man of business than he is. If things get very bad, persuade your father to let me deal with this money-lender; I should get better terms than he would."

"It is so kind of you to care," said Hildred, wistfully. "Oh! Mr. Gibson, I wish they had let me stay in London, and try to earn money. It is so hard for father."

"And they say the Earl's dangerously ill," returned the farmer, "or may be he'd have done something. It's come to this, Miss Hildred, someone must help soon. The income from the living's fallen off dreadfully even in the last six months; it's not enough to keep a man and his wife comfortably, let alone nine children."

Hildred looked very grave. When they stopped at the Manor Farm and Mr. Gibson repeated his entreaties to her to go in, she yielded. She seemed to feel she must have time to recover herself before she saw her father.

"Here, mother, I've brought you a visitor," cried the farmer, cheerfully. "I met her trying to walk from the station with a bag as big as herself, and I told her she must have some of your tea before she went any farther."

The big farm-house kitchen looked a very blaze of comfort. Hildred forgot how much she had suffered at the formal teas in the best parlour. Her very heart was sick with anxiety and fear.

Mrs. Gibson might be blunt spoken and unrefined, but she was true, and Hildred felt fresh courage as she received her warm welcome.

"Sit you down there, and take off your wet clothes," commanded Mrs. Gibson, "we'll have tea in a jiffy. Why, child, you look tired out!"

The farmer had gone out to give some orders about the horse. Hildred let her tears drop freely.

"It's very foolish; but no one came to meet me. It seemed as if they didn't care."

"It's a good long walk, my dear," said the practical woman; "and you know there's always plenty to do at home; but they do care, I can tell you. I met the little girls only yesterday, and they were all agog that Sissie was coming home."

Creature comforts have some effect on the spirits. When she had been dried and refreshed Hildred felt quite another creature, and was quite ready to accept Mrs. Gibson's reason for the lack of welcome which had so tried her.

"Come over here whenever you have a mind," said the farmer's wife, kindly, as Hildred clambered up in the old-fashioned gig, for Mr. Gibson would not hear of her going on foot with her bag to the Rectory.

How dreary the neglected garden looked, Hildred thought as she was set down at her own gate and walked up the weed-strewn path.

Everything was in need of repair—a little money spent in time would have transformed the place. Now the gate hung crooked, having lost one of its hinges; the fence was broken; and as she drew near the house and glanced at the windows, she could see that some of the missing panes of glass had been replaced by squares of paper.

What a contrast to the trim little villa in Daffodil-road, where all was so well cared for. The house door stood open, and Hildred walked wearily in. Martha met her in the hall.

"So it's you, Dreda," and she kissed her with some show of affection. "Mother would have it you had missed your train. I hope you don't want any tea; we have had ours long ago, and there's not a spark of fire in the kitchen grate, but I could get you some bread and butter."

Martha did not mean to be unkind; her manner was always blunt, but she spoke with-



[HILDRED, TIRED WITH HER LONG JOURNEY, TRUDGED WEARILY ON.]

out the least wish to wound her sister—merely intending to state the case plainly.

Hildred shivered, and felt thankful she had accepted Mrs. Gibson's hospitality.

"Your box is coming, I suppose?" said Martha, after Hildred had declined the bread-and-butter. "But what have you got in that bag? It looks a new one."

"It is; Aunt Bessie bought it for me when we went to the seaside."

"It's well to be you," said Martha, with a careless laugh. "But really, Hildred, I'm glad you've come home. Janey is no more use than a baby; I've had to do everything myself."

"But Maria used to work very well."

"Maria's been gone for ages," replied Martha, frankly. "We have a woman in once a week to do the washing and scrub the house. Things are very bad, you see, Hildred; and though Maria's wages were small, she had an enormous appetite."

"Where's father?"

"Gone to christen a baby who's dying, three miles off; and mother's lying down with one of her sick headaches; the children are playing in the garden. I told Janey to look after them, but I daresay she won't; she's fit for nothing but reading books."

When the Rector of Little Notherton came home he found the blinds drawn in his study, the lamp lighted, and the table arranged more neatly than it had been for weeks; while in the old leather chair sat Hildred, with a smile of welcome as he entered.

"What have they done to you, child? You look quite a fashionable young lady."

"I am just the same, father. Oh! father, please say you're glad to have me home."

"I am very glad to see you, dear; but I think it would have been happier for you if we could have spared you altogether to the Warringtons."

"No, father," she said, lovingly, "I'm your own child, and not to be given away."

Father dear, how ill you look, and your hair's greyer than when I went away. Have you missed me?"

He stroked the bright head tenderly.

"Aye, child, I have missed you sadly; but I always felt you were better off. I knew my sister would be good to you."

"She was as good as she could be; but, father, through it all I wanted you."

Supper was at nine: a very stale loaf and a remarkably small piece of Dutch cheese, flanked by a large jug of water. Certainly the Rector's family were not pampered by over-rich living.

Hildred ate hardly anything. Not that she was dainty, only the terrible gloom which hung over the house seemed to have taken away her appetite.

Her stepmother was coldly satirical as to her "grand relations," and the girls a little envious. Hildred felt, as she got into bed that night, as though her whole life were a failure, and she must be altogether a different person from the girl Uncle Dick had called a sun-beam.

One thing she found out gradually but surely before she had been at home a week; it was a cardinal sin to speak of Daffodil-road, and the relations who had been so kind to her.

Mrs. Elsinore was highly incensed because her sister-in-law had not invited Martha to fill Hildred's place.

The girls were mildly scornful when the aunt they had never seen was mentioned, and even the Rector seemed to shun the subject of the Warringtons.

"Your Aunt Bessie is well off. She can't understand our straits," he said once to Hildred, "and, child, to tell her of them would seem like asking alms, and I have not sunk so low as that; so, remember, Hildred, not a word of our poverty in your letters."

Hildred obeyed him, with the result that her letters became so short and strained Mrs. Warrington had very little pleasure in them.

Meanwhile the chain of poverty tightened its yoke and kept the Elsinores tight in its grip.

"What are you writing, father?" asked Hildred, when she had been at home two months, going into the fireless study one bitter November day, and finding the Rector still over a letter he had begun hours before.

Mr. Elsinore looked up with a troubled expression on his face.

"Hildred, do you know but for an old woman's malice you would have been an heiress?"

The girl thought his mind was wandering; but he went on,—

"Your grandmother died this very year worth more than a million of money. She left her whole fortune to a man who had not the slightest claim to it, and I am writing to him now."

"But why?" exclaimed Hildred, "surely you have not—"

The Rector finished his sentence.

"Asked alms? Yes, I have come even to that. It is easier to beg of a stranger than of one's own flesh and blood, Dreda. I could not have told my poverty to my sister; but I have written to Guy Bertram, and begged him of his abundance to provide for the last descendant of his benefactress, Lady Tempest."

(To be continued.)

In Germany every servant-girl keeps a little blank book, and once a week the mistress is obliged to paste therein a twopenny-halfpenny stamp purchased of the Government. Should the girl fall ill, the stamps are redeemed, and she is thus provided with a little sickness fund if she keeps her health long enough. When old age overtakes her, the Government pays the face-value of the uncanceled stamps. This little scheme was adopted by direction of the Emperor about two years ago.



[MR. MAXWELL STOOD RAGERLY WATCHING THE BEAUTIFUL FORM BEFORE HIM.]

TWO WOMEN.

CHAPTER VII.

HESTER was not unhappy in her school home. There was an old-world flavour about the red-brick house, and its lofty square rooms furnished in the stiff style of the early Victorian Era, that appealed to her.

She had left Sedgebrooke in an almost apathetic condition of mind. Mr. Chetwynde's treatment of her letter and her wishes had produced such sharp pain and disappointment that the apathy came naturally; the result of a sense of hopelessness, almost of despair. She left without seeing either Violet or her stepmother; Mrs. Campbell's maid came to superintend her departure, and with her own hands the girl packed away her humble poor wardrobe in one of the shabby leather portmanteaux that had belonged to her father. She took all her treasures with her, her books and her few pictures, and she went about her task of arrangement so proudly and with such dignity as to compel a tribute of admiration from Christine, the brown-eyed Frenchwoman who had the duty of serving Mrs. Campbell and her lovely daughter.

Hester was in fact conscious of a sense of relief and something like pleasure as she drove away from Sedgebrooke. She left nothing behind but sad memories. The few happy hours she had spent with George Campbell were submerged in the hundreds of bitter sad ones she had experienced under his roof. The relief and pleasure were not very clearly defined, for a great weariness seemed to have fallen upon her—a weariness of spirit, not of body. She was tired for the moment of battling against life and its contrariness. She let herself drift; she cared neither one way or another what became of her; she forgot her hopes, her ambitions, her dreams.

The peaceful routine of the school fell un-

consciously in with this mood. Even in her weariness, the girl could not withhold a tribute of sudden liking for, and sympathy with, the head of the school, who greeted her warmly and tried to make her feel at home.

There was nothing beautiful about Miss Graham. She was a homely, middle-aged woman, with a bright sensible face and clear kind eyes; but Hester felt drawn towards her new guardian, while on her side the governess was immediately attracted to the proud, cold girl with her secret of sorrow so plainly revealed in her magnificent eyes and restrained manner. She had been prepared for something so different.

Two days before, the Sedgebrook carriage had rolled up to her door, and Mrs. Campbell in her costly widow's weeds had been ushered into her presence. Her errand was soon explained; with all her well-cultivated charm conveying distinct touch of flattery, Mrs. Campbell placed her difficulty before Miss Graham. She wished her step-daughter to become an inmate of Woodstock House, as the school was called, as soon as possible—immediately, in fact. Miss Trefusis would remain the holidays at school. Mrs. Campbell was aware the term must be just drawing to a close, but she hoped Miss Graham would make a little concession to help her.

Hester required strict discipline; she was clever, very; but idle and of an extremely unruly, obstinate temper. Her legal guardian had desired further schooling, and so in her dilemma—for the girl had lately been more than disobedient.—Mrs. Campbell had thought of Miss Graham, whose charming school and excellent method and—Mrs. Campbell could not say enough.

The matter was arranged promptly, and the Sedgebrooke carriage had rolled away fleetly, leaving the schoolmistress enchanted with the beautiful, gracious woman who sat within it.

But the moment she beheld Hester and

came into direct contact with the girl's dignified, yet sweet, soulful individuality, she seemed to recognize the true being who had sat with her only two days before, and cast a glamour over her by the pretty words, the comely presence, the delicate flattery. She was surprised and pained as she looked at Hester. This was no unruly child, no idle, unworthy nature. This was a delicate, sensitive, intellectual creature, whose mind would match her young body's physical charm and beauty.

So, by an unspoken freemasonry as it were, these two were immediately drawn together, the middle-aged governess and the young, high-strung, imaginative girl; and so it was that scarcely had a week passed into oblivion before Hester's crushed, disappointed spirit began to lift its head and draw fresh breath of life.

She put her sorrows behind her; she never let herself think of those things that had so troubled her; she never wrote to Mr. Chetwynde, though, had she done so, the letter would not have reached him, for, according to instructions and to her promise, Miss Graham would have forwarded the letter to Mrs. Campbell. Not that this would have been a task at all pleasant to the governess, whose liking for Hester had increased and deepened at further acquaintance with her pupil, and who almost resented Mrs. Campbell's wishes in this respect, but a promise once given with Constance Graham was always a promise, and consequently Hester's correspondence, had she had any, would have been forwarded to Sedgebrooke.

The girl, however, had neither the intention nor the wish to write to Mr. Chetwynde, the only person to whom she had to write. She accepted his former treatment of her letter as more than eloquent of his attitude towards her, and she determined never to approach him again.

She fell into her place in the school quietly.

She was not treated like an ordinary pupil, her talents and knowledge put her above and apart from the others. She studied like the rest, and was regarded with some awe and a good deal of admiration by the limited number of girls who resided under Miss Graham's care. Hester's quiet, proud manner did not encourage confidence or enthusiasm, but her kindness was speedily recognized.

Examinations were just starting, and she was quick to give her help to anyone of the girls who needed it and appealed to her superior knowledge for assistance. She seemed to make no choice among the pretty young creatures, but in reality the warmth of her heart went out almost unconsciously to a stout, fair-haired girl, by name Leonore Leighton, an orphan who had lived with Miss Graham for some years, and who would be Hester's companion during the holidays—that were close at hand.

At first Hester had imagined Leonore to have been a dependent, some poor atom of charity, but she was soon undeceived. Miss Leighton was an heiress in her own right of a really enormous fortune. She was the child of humble parents; her father had been a self-made man who had amassed money in a miraculous way, and who in dying had bequeathed his child to the care of his lawyer, with instructions that she was to be educated as near to perfection as possible; to be brought up absolutely apart from any of her humble belongings; to adopt a better and more high-sounding name than the one she inherited from him, and was to be found a husband of good social position as soon as her education was completed.

Hester felt a great pity and affection rise in her chilled heart for this girl. It was impossible not to be sorry for Leonore, she was so very, very rich, so overweighted with her wealth and the duties imposed on her by that wealth.

She was so very plain, too, clumsy and stupid; despite all and every effort, her education progressed at a tortoise-like pace. She could not learn; Miss Graham was in despair about her.

She was now nineteen years of age, and she was as backward as a child of twelve. She tried her best, but her brains were dull and would not help her. And this very year she was to leave her school and make her appearance in the world where already the fame of her fortune was known.

Hester's pity for the girl was deep and sincere, and to Leonore Leighton alone she unbent from her proud reserve, and held out the hand of friendship and affection.

In return she received simple adoration, for, despite the dulness of her intellectual brain, Leonore had enough of her father's shrewdness in her to grasp the true from the false, and Hester's sympathy had the true ring in it.

Hester's affection looked for no material return; she was in the other girl's eyes a princess of beauty and sweetness; and as for her cleverness, Leonore was fully determined that Hester could do anything and everything a human brain and human being could perform.

Naturally the event of a marriage in the neighbourhood was a great affair to the school girls, and as glimpses of Violet's delicate loveliness had been caught from time to time, the romance and excitement over her wedding was doubled in consequence.

If any one of her school comrades ventured to wonder why Hester was not included in the festivities of her step-sister's wedding they none of them expressed so much to her; and as she never so much as mentioned Sedgebrooke or any of its inhabitants, they were obliged to confine their curiosity to futile questionings and answers among themselves.

The days were away, too, quickly, and the matter was soon forgotten. The holidays came; there was a scene of bustle and confusion, laughter and excitement for a few hours, and then Woodstock House was robbed

of its young inmates—none being left save Hester Trefusis and Leonore Leighton.

Hester had now been more than a month in her new home, and the good influence of daily association with these things, those principles so necessary to her nature, showed itself most clearly in the girl's daily increasing beauty and the marked cheerfulness of her manner. Not a little of this benefit was derived from Leonore's constant companionship; true, Miss Leighton was not the most intellectual individual in the world, but she was so honest, so simple, so sweet-natured, Hester found it impossible not to love her.

Love was overflowing in her heart, it was bound to have some vent. She felt something like a return of the old childish happiness she had experienced when her father had been alive and she had ministered to him, proving herself, even as a mite, to be the stronger character of the two.

Now she ministered to Leonore Leighton, and struggled her best to shape the girl a little into the likeness Miss Graham was so anxious she should wear. With the other girls gone, Hester found her work much easier.

There was nothing she did not attempt. Mrs. Campbell would have opened her blue eyes in astonishment if she could have seen into the deserted schoolroom and watched her proud, cold step-daughter laughing and coaxing and showing poor Leonore how to walk, how to walk with grace, how to sit down and rise up, how to curtsy, and, in fact, how to comport herself like an ordinary gentlewoman.

"My dear," Miss Graham said to Hester one hot afternoon in early August, "my dear, you have done miracles—miracles! It is marvellous. I have despaired of Leonore; she has been so hopeless. If ever she obtains any success in the world she will owe it all to you; but you must not overture yourself, my child. You are looking very pale. I heard you drilling Leonore far too long this morning. I cannot let you make yourself ill!"

Hester held the governess's hand in her small one.

"I am quite, quite well; and I am so happy to think I can help Leonore. I do not think I have been so happy since I was a little girl and my dear father was alive!"

Miss Graham pressed the girl's hand and said nothing. Long ago she had arrived at her own conclusions about Mrs. Campbell and about Hester. She was glad that the step-mother made no attempt to come and see her, for she felt that had this been done she must have spoken out something of what was in her heart.

Gossip had travelled very little in Miss Graham's direction, but she had heard some of the talk that had circulated at the time of George Monroe Campbell's marriage; and she recalled it now, when the fact of his widow's attitude towards her step-daughter was made patent to her.

No words passed between Hester and herself, but Miss Graham might reasonably claim to know a little about human nature, and she had not studied Hester Trefusis so carefully without having arrived at some good conclusion about her, and that conclusion the full acknowledgment of the girl's great qualities and absolutely superior character.

There were some moments when Hester would lose a little of her new found pleasure and interest, and lapse into troubled thought. It was when the sight of George Campbell's picture brought back the memory of the hours when they had sat talking with him, talking of the young man whom she had grown to know and like so well by hearsay—the young man who was now the husband of Violet—the companion of her soulless superficial loveliness.

It was not possible for Hester to think on this matter quietly. The blind folly of the man, the infatuation, the overwhelming trust and adoration. All those touched her quick heart with deep pity and fear, for she saw the shadowy phantoms of the future standing ready to slip into the places of these things

when the awakening came and the truth was realized, as realized it would most certainly be. But she did not encourage herself to think much on the subject. The mischief was done, all the thinking in the world would not alter it; and, moreover, there would be little in common between herself and the Thuroes. They belonged to another world.

She had no wish to come in contact with Violet, and she had a curious sort of repugnance to meeting with George Campbell's much loved nephew, now that he belonged to the people whom she had such good reason to despise and dislike.

It was only in odd moments she thought of him, and wondered if he had ever delivered the letter to his sister that she had given him that first day he had come to Sedgebrooke—the letter poor George Campbell had traced with such difficulty the day he lay dying after his terrible accident. Hester had accepted the commission in silence. Her heart was cold within her, her eyes were red and tearless; for grief with her did not always speak openly, it was not until her one kind friend lay cold in his grave that she realized the fulness of his affection and thought for her, for she knew, without reading the contents, that he had confided her as a friend to the little niece he had loved so well.

As day succeeded day, and no sort of communication reached her from Lady Alice Cairne in answer to that letter, Hester grew to regard the matter as finished. She had never dwelt much on the prospect of any friendship with this girl, who, in common with her brother Dick, had held such a big place in the dead man's heart, and she had simply delivered the letter as a sacred duty to one who could never desire or command again.

She was now and then just a little astonished and angry with herself in a vague sort of way, that she should have allowed herself to have dwelt so much on Lord Thuroe and his sister—have pictured their characters and dreamed misty thoughts about them; she was angry only because she felt as if she had lost something when she realized that she had encountered Lord Thuroe in the flesh, and that henceforth her dream here must vanish into oblivion and be no more.

She had a strong longing too, in these times, that her fears might never be realized, that he might never be undeceived, that Violet would never let him see the flaws in her brilliant personality—never let him know the mistakes he had made.

Hester knew Violet was more clever in these things than her mother, and she had hoped that once safely launched on the deep, sparkling waters of aristocratic social life, Violet would be much too careful to let herself risk or forget anything; but then, as Hester was continually telling herself, she did not understand Violet's nature, and therefore she could conjecture nothing definite. Hope alone was left her, and for George Campbell's loved memory she did hope that happiness might rest with Richard, Earl of Thuroe, for many and many and many a day.

It was when the holidays were about a fortnight old that Miss Graham announced some news that sent poor Leonore into a wild, flustering state of excitement and fear.

"I have had a letter from your guardian, my dear," the governess said. "He writes to tell me he is coming down to-morrow to see you, and to make all arrangements with you as to your future plans, immediate and otherwise. He will stay here as my guest for a few days."

Hester was seated at the old school piano, singing to herself quietly in her beautiful, rich, young voice, when Leonore burst in upon her with this information.

"Oh dear! He will take me away from you, away from here, and I have been happy here. How do I know what the world will be like? I am sure I don't want the world. I wish I had never had any money—I wish—" and then Miss Leighton stopped, and looked

out of her pathetic blurred eyes at Hester's dark beauty. "I wish I could give it all to you, and then I could go with you and be your servant, and wait on you hand and foot. Oh! Hester, if only I could do that!"

"You are a dear silly, Leonore," Hester answered, with the tenderness that sounded so rarely in her voice, and yet that lay so near the surface to all who only knew just where and how to touch it. She got up and arranged Leonore's gown, quietly pulling the bodice here, arranging it there, moving her hands gently as a mother would touch a child.

Leonore burst into a flood of tears—she was not given to much emotion as a rule, but Hester had grown to be to her something more than life itself.

"Oh! Hester, I can't leave you! I can't—I can't!"

Hester cheered the girl as well as she could; but her own heart felt heavy, for Leonore would take away with her much that now made life pleasant—even happy—in a quiet, peaceful sense.

"This is not my dear brave Leonore," she said, as she knelt beside the clumsy form that not all the modistes in the world would be able to make smart or graceful. "You know how we have talked of all this, and how you have promised—"

"I will keep all my promises to you," Leonore cried vehemently, and she dabbed her eyes with her handkerchief; then a smile broke out on her tear-stained face. "Hester, why should you leave me?—why should you not go with me. I am my own mistress now, I can do what I like and have what I like; why should I not have you to live with me always? Oh, Hester! it would be so beautiful, and I should be so happy; say you would like it too. You have talked so often of wanting to work hard in the world to do good. Why should you not come with me? You will have me for work. I think I shall be hard enough for you."

The heiress ended with a pathetic touch in her voice.

Hester was silent a moment. The words opened out suddenly a new view of life. It was not an unpleasant one to her—it had, in fact, a gleam of sunshine falling lightly amid the different pictures which rose unconsciously and swiftly in her mind. The sunshine came with the thought of Leonore's love. It was very sweet to Hester in her loneliness, in her isolation from all the strong keen joys of a domestic existence to know what she had become, and what she might still further grow to be in the life of this poor misplaced young creature. Her heart leaped at the sudden pleasure she experienced in the knowledge of the help she could give to Leonore now that she had to leave the small peaceful world of school for the big fierce outer world with all its pains, disappointments, and sorrows.

She never knew, until this moment, how strong a part of her nature was the womanly yearning and desire, the unselfish maternal instinct to protect and help the weak, to support and comfort those who craved for her love, and clung to her resolute noble character.

She made an evasive answer to Leonore, however. She was accustomed to disappointment, and if this suggestion could not be realised she would know how to bear with it.

Leonore was different, and so Hester would not give her even one straw of hope to weave into the bricks of a castle that might at any moment be dashed to the ground.

"You are not gone yet," she said; "who knows? perhaps you won't leave so quickly." "Ah!" cried Leonore, delightedly. "If I might only stay a little while longer. I shall ask if I may. Miss Graham says Mr. Chetwynde is coming to-morrow, so I shall just speak plainly to him and ask him to let me stay on here a little longer. What is the use of being rich if you can't do what you like?" asked Miss Leighton, in that shrewd matter-of-fact way that occasionally made itself

apparent in her otherwise helpless manner and conversation.

Hester made no answer; she was frowning slightly. Leonore had made mention of a Mr. Chetwynde. Could it be possible that her friend's guardian was one and the same with her father's lawyer?

If this were so, it would be but a proof of the truth of the old adage, that fact is stranger than fiction; and it would also at once do away with all thoughts of a future with Leonore.

Mr. Chetwynde had shown her so plainly he would not interfere with Mrs. Campbell's guardianship, that she must bear with her lot until she was of age.

She had no wish to meet him, and the mention of his name brought a cloud on her new and faint happiness, sending her back to the old troubled frame of mind that had been her daily condition at Sedgebrooke.

CHAPTER VIII.

The next day Leonore Leighton's guardian duly appeared. Hester went out into the old-fashioned garden with her book.

She had spent an hour in dressing Leonore, arranging her fair hair, which was the girl's only beauty, to its best advantage, toning down the glaringly ugly points, and trying to impress the nervous, awkward creature with some of her own ease and dignity of manner.

She sighed as she went out of the house, having accompanied Leonore to the door of the drawing-room. She was so sorry for her poor, unattractive friend; her whole heart yearned over the girl who had been placed so strangely, as it were, in such an important and onerous position.

"Poor Leonore!" she said to herself. She sat down on a bench far away from the house, and leaned back wearily against the stout trunk of a veteran tree that stood behind the seat.

She wore no hat; her dark hair was loosely coiled about her queenly head; her dress was of white linen, gathered in at her slender waist with a brown leathern girdle.

She had grown marvelously beautiful in the short time she had been at the old school-house; it was as though the release from the continual harassing and painful presence of two base natures had worked its way physically as well as mentally.

Certainly Hester had never looked as she did now. Miss Graham saw some fresh beauty in the girl every day. With the influence of peace and true sympathy and understanding to push aside the old feelings of constraint, repugnance, contempt, the girl's youth and natural loveliness asserted itself. Even yet she had not arrived at the fulness of her physical perfections; another six months of a similar life to that she had led during the last few weeks, and Hester Trilasia would be what she had promised to be—a woman of exceptional beauty and extraordinary attractive powers.

She made a sufficiently charming picture now as she leaned in a sort of graceful languor against the tree, her book unopened on her knee, clasped between her small white hands, her magnificent eyes going over the expanse of orchard and kitchen garden which lay at the end of the school grounds.

She was deep in thought—so still she might have been a figure of marble or alabaster, not a human being of delicate flesh and feeling.

A young man, standing a little distance away out of the range of her eyes, gazed at her as if he could not gaze enough.

He was a handsome man, dark, with a foreign yet a supremely distinguished air. He stood in an easy attitude, not devoid of grace, and there was a look of keenness, almost of excitement in his very dark eyes.

"It must be she," he said to himself. "Parbleu! quelle chance! A véritable Vénus! a queen! What did Chetwynde mean by

deceiving me? He did his best to prepare me for a monster, whereas—"

Hester moved a little; she bent forward in a manner very characteristic of her, leaning her chin in one hand and resting her elbow on her knee. There was a new grace in each movement.

The young man's eyes grew full of admiration.

"It is almost too much. This girl would be a treasure without a sou, but with her fortune! A face like that, a form divine, and half a million of golden sovereigns—no feeble francs, but solid English gold—half a million!—and such loveliness!"

He drew back a little.

Hester had moved again, and her face was turned a little more in his direction. All innocent of any other presence, the very soul of the girl in all its purity and beauty was mirrored in her face; she had drifted into some of her old ambitious thoughts, some of the old dreams of a life's nobility, of an honourable career, had crept into her mind—and her countenance was transfigured into more than beauty as she thought.

Suddenly she turned. A voice in the distance cried—

"Hester! Hester! Where are you? I want you."

The man watching her frowned, even as he noted her proud bearing as she rose to her feet.

The voice in the distance was neither refined nor musical; and she answered to the name of Hester. Had he then made a mistake after all? Was his rapture, his satisfaction, to be short-lived?

The girl he had come down to seek in marriage was not called Hester. He knew her name well—had he not told it over and over again to himself a hundred times during the past month, when he had sat dreaming of the fortune that would be his once Leonore Leighton became his wife—wife of Sir Charles Maxwell, baronet, son of one of the oldest Scotch families in existence, with an exchequer as empty as a drum, and his only available property his lengthy list of noble and gallant ancestors, and his own handsome personage.

Yes, Charles Maxwell had good reason to know Miss Leighton's name; she had been to him a sort of luminous star shining clearer and nearer every day, and pointing to a great golden road of freedom—freedom from the curse of perpetual debt, the ceaseless struggles with the necessities of a man of good social position.

It was about six months before that he had gone to the well-established lawyer who had the doubtful pleasure and honour of managing his affairs.

"Look here, Chetwynde," he had said, curtly, after a more than usually disagreeable interview, "the long and short of it is—I must have money; I don't care how I get it, but have it I must. I am sick of this sort of thing. I thought there would be some pleasure in life when I came so unexpectedly into the title last year, but, *Parbleu!* I don't see it!"

Mr. Chetwynde, a sharp but not unkind faced man, trim, dapper, business like, had looked keenly at the speaker. He had never known much about the present baronet. Sir Charles had come suddenly into the title by the regrettable death of his uncle and cousin, following swiftly one on the other, and there had been some little difficulty in finding the next heir when this had occurred. He turned up at last in Paris; but beyond a few vague words about a hard struggle for life, and extreme pleasure at the unexpected change that had come to him, Mr. Chetwynde had not learnt much about the antecedents of the young man. He was undoubtedly the proper heir; his father had been brother to the late head of the family, and his mother had been a beautiful Frenchwoman from whom he inherited his dark eyes and foreign bearing.

"Mr Chetwynde was not fond of foreigners,

but it was impossible to resist the charm of the young man's manners. The Maxwell estate was almost a myth. Sir Charles speedily found his new existence not a bed of roses. He had brought with him a fair harvest of debt and he at once set about increasing it, a task which he managed to do with considerable success and celerity.

Unfortunately, however, it was a well-known fact in the trade that the Maxwell coffers were but meagrely filled, and then followed a time of much annoyance to the smart young man who had at once won his way to the heart of society—more especially the feminine heart. It was necessary to do something definite—if needs be, desperate.

"Can't you think of a way?" he suggested to the lawyer.

Mr. Chetwynde knitted his brows, and looked keenly at the handsome speaker.

"I know of a way," he said, when he spoke, "but—"

"But what? *mon Dieu!* Chetwynde, speak out!"

The lawyer paused a moment. The bequest of the late worthy Daniel Late, publican of Bow, was one that had weighed many a time on William Chetwynde's honest mind. He had fulfilled his duty to the utmost: he had christened Ellen Late Miss Leonore Leighton; he had placed her with Miss Graham whom, with the strangest of strange fates, all things considered, he knew to be perhaps the best woman in the world to help him in his dilemma; he had ascertained frequently of his ward's progress; and now the year appointed by her father for her to attain her majority and become mistress of her vast fortune had arrived, and the most serious and important feature of the bequest had to be faced and overcome.

It can easily be imagined it was a matter that gave the good Mr. Chetwynde much anxious thought and care. Half a million sterling was no bagatelle and yet—The will of Daniel Late set forth that his daughter was to be found a husband as soon as possible—a husband from the aristocracy, with a title if possible, most certainly closely allied to one. No tradesman, no middle class person, no simple gentleman was to be endowed with money gathered together by the most unromantic and probably not the most disinterested means.

Mr. Chetwynde may naturally be forgiven if he gave a sigh of relief when Sir Charles Maxwell presented himself and his penniless self before him and asked him for counsel and aid, yet the lawyer had a conscience, and he hesitated for a moment before confiding an innocent girl to the care of one who might perchance prove unworthy of the great fortune fate had put in his way.

He hesitated only a little while, however. The more he thought, the more feasible and possible the arrangement seemed; and the end was that when he set forth to go and interview his ward in Miss Graham's house, he took Sir Charles Maxwell with him to introduce him to the girl who was to be his wife and his pecuniary saviour. On their arrival at Woodstock House, Mr. Chetwynde had abruptly dismissed the young man into the garden.

"I will get the preliminaries over first, and then I will call you in," he said, shortly.

So Sir Charles had sauntered into the old school garden, wondering in a vague, not unexcited fashion what form and likeness his heiress wife would wear, and telling himself that if she were worse than the picture of the *gauche* school-girl Chetwynde had drawn for his edification she would still be beautiful in his eyes, still have charms greater than the most enchanting loveliness in the world.

"I wish she had any coloured hair but yellow," he mused to himself, as he walked, and a curious look came over his dark, handsome face. "Dame! how mad I was over those golden curls. It was the nearest touch to real love I ever felt; and what a wockery, what a disillusionment."

He shrugged his shoulders.

"I thought I had known my world. I told myself I knew women, that there was not a trick, not a gesture I did not understand, and she deceived me through and through! By Heaven! but I would give half I shall possess to make her suffer a little, to punish her for her insolence. That she should have made a fool of me, she—that lovely child, that angel child, with her big, innocent blue eyes and her soft, golden curls—that she should have dared," and then the hot passion called up by this train of thought died a sudden death as his fierce eyes fell on Hester's graceful figure, and eagerly noted each mental and physical beauty in her face.

His heart stood still. He had never seen a countenance like this girl's before. It touched him as he never remembered to have been touched in all his selfish, dissipated career. He had a strange sort of feeling as if he were in the presence of a saint or some sacred altar. He drew back and watched her as we have seen, a sudden delight, a rush of amazed satisfaction coming over him, as he conjectured he was gazing at the girl who was to be his wife.

The sound of Leonore's voice in the distance woke him harshly from this dream, and if he had required confirmation that Hester's queenly loveliness was not destined for him, he received it in her own words.

The girl rose hurriedly, and with a start.

"Here, Leonore. I am here," she called, in her sweet, rich voice.

Charles Maxwell drew back till he was hidden from sight by a second old giant tree-trunk.

He watched Hester with something like a pang of disappointment now as she moved slowly forward to meet her friend. The value, the greatness of her beauty became a pain when he remembered his position and his destiny.

He felt now that his bride-elect would prove, as Mr. Chetwynde had tried to convey as delicately as possible, something in the nature of a gilded pill; but he was by no means prepared for such a revelation of unlovely womanhood as poor Leonore presented to his eyes.

Sir Charles said a very wicked word under his breath as he beheld the clumsy figure, with its red face and pale eyes, and redder hands hanging awkwardly by her sides.

"*Mon Dieu! mais c'est impossible absolument impossible! Je ne puis pas le faire.*" he said to himself, in this the first moment of disgust. "Chetwynde should have told me. *Il faut avoir le goût d'un chien!* I want her money, but—"

But he knew very well he would have degraded his manhood even more than marriage with poor, luckless Leonore to have obtained even half of the fortune she possessed.

He heard her talking excitedly to Hester, and he heard Hester's soft, low replies. The whole story of her future was unfolded by Leonore in those moments.

There was something almost pathetic in the girl's simplicity, most certainly there was a note of sadness in the way she clung to Hester.

"Oh! I don't want to marry. I don't want to marry, Hester. Why did my father leave such a will? Why did he leave me this money? Oh! I am so unhappy—so unhappy. And now I must leave you, I must go away, and everybody will hate me. Don't I know? I am very stupid; but I am not so stupid as not to know it is all my money. No one would look at me if I were quite poor; no one would care if I lived or died—or—"

Charles Maxwell laughed cynically to himself. "A 'monstre' with a heart: what a fate! Really things ought to be arranged differently. Nature ought not to let such an ugly individual possess even a limited amount of discrimination. It is painful to herself and annoying to others."

He was too angry with the sorry trick Fate

had played him in giving him such ugliness for a wife, even endowed so richly as she was, to let a glimmer of a better nature recognize the pathetic trouble in Leonore's confession. He heard Hester speaking gentle tender words of comfort, but he had even a bitter thought for her in this moment. It did not seem to him possible anyone could care for that ungainly lump of human flesh. He accused Hester, in his cynicism, of another and of course a mercenary, unworthy motive.

It was to be given Hester Trefusis to teach this man not one, but several lessons of life that as yet had not come to his knowledge or understanding.

He stood where he was, plunged in his thoughts, while the two girls walked away to the house; and then by and by Mr. Chetwynde came to find him, and he accompanied the lawyer in silence to the drawing-room, where poor Leonore sat shivering palpably with fear and awkwardness, and Hester stood at a distant window, her big eyes fixed on the man in whose hands the future happiness of her poor friend was to rest.

She acknowledged the introduction to Sir Charles Maxwell with the merest and most haughty inclination of her proud head. She immediately conceived a distrust and dislike to him. The mere fact of his handsome polished appearance made his position more contemptible to her stern rigorous sense of what was manly and honourable.

The contrast between himself and his future wife was terrible. To Hester, it was incomprehensible how anyone, least of all a young, strong man, could adopt such a miserable and unworthy method of obtaining money. Had she this man's independence, strength, and chance in the world, such as is only given to men, what would she not have tried to achieve; what honour would she not have tried to grasp?

She turned away abruptly; her contempt was so strong she felt she must convey it in lip and eye. And, after all, the matter was not her affair; but for her love and pity for Leonore she would not have been present, more especially as she felt a strong inward conviction that Mr. Chetwynde was her own legal guardian, and remembering his treatment of her letter, she would have preferred to have avoided meeting him altogether.

Leonore Leighton, however, had once entreated her to be present at the introduction to her future husband, and sooner than give the poor girl further pain Hester would have done more than sacrifice her own proud feelings.

Afterwards she rejoiced she had done so; for while she stood by the window and Sir Charles was trying to make some conversation with Leonore, Mr. Chetwynde approached her and spoke her name.

"I feel I am addressing myself to the daughter of an old and dear friend; you are Hester Trefusis, are you not?" he said, noting the girl's beauty, and beaming with great pleasure.

"Yes, I am Hester Trefusis," the girl replied.

Before another five minutes had elapsed Hester was in possession of another proof of her step-mother's dishonour and trickery, and she had confessed to Mr. Chetwynde her regret that she had doubted him and judged him according as she had been compelled to do.

Out of darkness, therefore, came light; for though it was impossible for Hester to feel anything but sorry for her girl comrade, she could not help being relieved and comforted at being assured of the faith and loyalty of her father's old trusted friend.

Sedgebrooke village was *en fête*; flags were waving across the tiny streets; arches of evergreens, gay with flower decorations, stretched across the park gates; a general holiday had been given on the auspicious occasion of the return of the Earl and Countess of Thurso to the big house in the park.

The newly married pair had only taken a

short holiday; they had avoided Scotland for obvious reasons.

To have gone into the stronghold of the Thurso family, when the Thurso family refused to show the faintest acknowledgement of the wedding, would have been uncomfortable; so they had chosen to go a-yachting instead, and a very happy time they had of it.

Thurso was almost too happy—even the memory of his mother's sad, disappointed letter could not shadow his happiness.

Violet was more enchanting every day, more lovely, more bewitching. Lady Thurso was in fact enjoying herself immensely.

She revelled in the grandeur of her new position; she loved to see the coronet on her belongings, to be addressed by her title, to have all the accompaniments of a woman of rank perpetually under her notice.

She liked her husband, too, in an indefinite sort of way. He was handsome, and he fitted in well with her luxurious surroundings. She accepted his adoration as a matter of course; she was tasting the first sweets of power in the admiration she roused in his breast. Her heart beat high as she pictured her entrance into the world of fashion, and the success she would obtain.

Two things, however, rose on the sky of Violet's contentment: one was the attitude of her husband's family, the other was her mother. She spoke very sweetly of her mother to her husband, sighed and looked pathetic when she did so, exclaimed how her dear mummy must miss her; but all the time she was planning in her clever, shrewd brain how she could best dispose of her mother and keep her out of her life altogether.

"To have mamma always tacked on to me would mean disaster," she said to herself, and she grew more and more decided as each day passed to arrange some means by which Mrs. Campbell did not mingle or mix with her in any way.

Violet wrote home sweet babyish letters to her mother the while she was planning this; and little did Helen Campbell think, as she rose on the day of her child's triumphal return to Sedgebrook, where for a time the young couple would stay, and her heart beat high with delight, of the shadow that was slowly but surely creeping over the brilliancy of her attained ambition.

All the village turned out *en masse* to see the arrival of the Earl and Countess. Violet had dressed herself in the most exquisite fashion. It was absolute joy to her to sit in the big carriage and receive bouquets, and smile and bow to the people just like a real princess.

Lord Thurso had chosen the long route for the drive home, so that all the tenants might gaze on the loveliness of his bride. So they had arrived at the village station of Helmetstone, and there he had lifted her into the landau with its four grey horses and outriders.

The commotion and excitement in the place had reached the one guest at the Helmetstone Inn. Sir Charles Maxwell had brought down his valet and his portmanteau. It was necessary he should be near his *fiancée* to pay her daily attention, and she had pleaded so hard to remain at the school with Hester until the last that Mr. Chetwynde could not refuse.

It would have been insufferably dull to Maxwell but for the intoxicating presence of Hester Trefusis.

The man was madly, wildly in love with the cold proud girl who showed him her dislike and contempt so plainly. It only seemed to whet his passionate admiration still further, though all the while he knew the folly and the hopelessness of the wild dream that had come to him. Even had Hester been kinder, there never could be anything for him with her, he was bound hand and foot. In another month the die would be cast, and Leonore and her money would be his property.

The noise and the shouting reached his ears as he sat moodily smoking his cigar. He rose and sauntered on to the doorstep. Just as the carriage came slowly along the street a

dozen voices exclaimed the identity of the two sitting in the carriage.

Maxwell suddenly flung away his cigar and leant forward. He was pale with suppressed excitement.

Violet was laughing and bowing and kissing her hands to all. Her lap was heaped with flowers.

Thurso tried to concentrate his attention on those around, but his eyes would wander to her lovely face.

As they passed the little inn, gay with bunting, Violet looked round laughingly; but all at once her smile went—a look of absolute dread and agonised fear came into her blue eyes.

She crushed the flowers lying on her lap in that moment of agony. Then, as her husband looked down at her, she rallied. With an enormous effort she curved her trembling lips into a smile; and so she was carried on into the pathway of her new life that had seemed so radiant a second before, but now had a shadow thrown across it, the cold dark shadow of the past—a past she did not dare let herself remember clearly at this moment.

(To be continued.)

A PLAYTHING OF FORTUNE.

CHAPTER XXII.

For many minutes there was a painful silence in the room. Brenda neither cried out nor moaned, but there seemed something more touching in the hideous stillness than all the lamentations could have contained.

The baby eyes were fixed for some moments upon the bowed head, and then lifted to Bessie's face, but there was nothing to be learned from its set rigidity. The soft eyes were turned back and the baby fingers buried themselves in the short, curling locks. That tender touch seemed to do more to arouse Brenda than anything else on earth could have done.

She raised her head and clasped the little form in her arms, her countenance so filled with misery and yearning that Bessie almost cried out. She caught Brenda by the shoulder and shook her slightly.

"What is it?" she gasped. "Speak to me quickly!"

But Brenda did not hear. She was looking into the little face that she had not seen for such long, weary months—looking as if she could never see enough. Then she kissed the child again and again, until the little creature pushed her back, half frightened at her vehemence.

"Did I hurt you, my darling?" the unhappy mother whispered, forgetful of that other presence. "Don't you know me, my little one? Oh, my baby, my baby! If you knew how I have longed and prayed for a sight of your little face! If you but knew all the agony that I have endured! Kiss me, my own!"

The baby mouth faintly touched hers, a sweet, cooling laugh fell upon her ears, and the unsteady, groping lips murmured:

"Pitty laly!"

They were the first words that she had ever heard her child utter, and she caught him to her with renewed rapture. Then suddenly she—remembered.

She turned to Bessie with a gasp that was almost a groan, and, letting her arms fall from about the child, staggered to her feet.

Bessie was looking at her with some horrible fear expressed in the blue eyes. Her lips were slightly parted, a crimson spot burned in either cheek, and her breath came in little, irregular gasps. She looked from the woman's face to the child's, and back again. There was no mistaking the resemblance when seen together. The eyes were the same, the shape of the mouth identical, the

singularly clear complexion exactly reproduced in the child.

Bessie groaned.

She put out her hand half blindly, but Brenda made no move to take it. She stood there like a creature turned to stone, a whitened horror making her beautiful face ghastly.

The baby was the first to break the awful silence. He put out his little arm to Brenda as the little lips murmured, brokenly:

"Tate me!"

"A smile of ineffable happiness broke over the marble face. She snatched up the child, pressing him closely to her wildly throbbing heart. She kissed him half a dozen times, then she turned to Bessie. There was an expression of madness almost in the great, burning eyes.

She put the baby back on the sofa before she spoke; then, almost humbly, she whispered:

"What shall I say to you? What shall I—"

"The truth!" interrupted Bessie, hoarsely. "For Heaven's sake, the truth! Remember that the child's adoptive father is my sister's husband."

"Adoptive father!" repeated Brenda.

Bessie did not reply. There seemed to her something ominous in the repetition of the words. She only gazed dumbly. The pause seemed to give Brenda time to collect her thoughts.

After all, then, Lionel had ignored what he must have believed her dying request. He had not acknowledged the child as his own—the honorable issue of a legitimate marriage. He had not told the truth to her father. He had put the stain of illegitimacy upon his own child; he had stamped what he believed his dead wife as a wanton, and he had married again within a few short months after he had placed that dead body in the ground.

A hard, almost cruel smile drew the corners of the lovely mouth. And then the memory of an innocent woman came back to her. Should she have no mercy on the sister of that girl who had been her friend, and whom she really loved? It was too late now to prevent that terrible wrong. Had she then the right to acknowledge at this late date that she had allowed Lionel Warrender to commit a crime—that she had put that hideous shame upon a blameless woman?

"No—a thousand times no, she had not the right! She had marked out the lines of her own life, and now that there were others, and innocent ones, merged into them, she must accept the frightful position in which she had placed herself. She had not the right to make that guiltless woman suffer.

She bowed her head as one does who has received his death sentence.

There was a momentary silence. Then, without lifting her eyes, she said, dull:

"Bessie, I saved your life once. Perhaps you think you owe me something for that act. I should be the last one upon earth to mention such a thing to you, did I not find myself in the teeth of a horrible emergency. You have said that I risked my life to save you. Are you willing to repay me for that act?"

"Go on!" exclaimed the sick girl, hoarsely.

"Promise me that you will never mention to any living being what has occurred here to-day! Promise me that neither to Lionel Warrender nor to your sister, who is his—wife, you will ever speak my name, or refer in any way to the scene which my weakness made impossible to prevent. I will, in return swear to you that I will go away; that I will make no attempt ever to see the child again; that I will never come into your sister's life nor yours; that I will be dead to all your world from this day forever!"

She waited breathlessly for the reply which did not come at once. Bessie had grown paler than before. She seemed to be thinking deeply. Brenda was about to speak again, but before she could do so the crippled girl put up her hand with a gesture for silence.

"Wait!" she exclaimed, huskily. "There is one question that you must answer: What is Lionel Warrender to you?"

There was an awful struggle. "Could she deny the father of her child? There was no help for it. Brenda had died upon that morning when she had placed her wedding-ring upon the hand of that dead girl. She had given up all claim then. She had no right to resume it now when her husband belonged to another woman. She had deliberately given him the right to do what he had done. She could curse that other woman's life as hers had been cursed.

She lifted her eyes and fixed them upon Bessie for the first time. Twice she opened her lips to speak before the words would come; then she forced herself to say, quietly:

"He is nothing to me!"

"Is that true?" whispered Bessie.

"True!" she answered, heavily.

"Then what is the meaning of this? For Heaven's sake, tell me the truth. This is no time for deception now. What is that child to you?"

"Do not force me to answer that!" replied Brenda, in a tone of anguish. "It can make no difference to anyone in this whole world—none whatever! I swear that to you I knew Lionel Warrender—once. Surely it is enough. He believes me dead. For the love of Heaven, let him continue to think so! It could do no good to anyone—not to anyone. If I had known, I should never have come here—never! For your sister's sake, keep my secret. Do not let him suspect that I am not dead."

And Bessie thought she understood. A great pity for the unhappy girl filled her tender heart. Her eyes filled with tears, and once again she put out her hands to her. Brenda saw and fell upon her knees, bowing her head over the tiny bony fingers.

"My poor girl!" whispered Bessie, smoothing down the curly locks that the baby had ruffled. "My poor, unhappy girl! I understand so much now. I can see what changed him so—hideously! I can see now why he preferred the revolver to the course that was thrust upon him. I understand his words to me now upon the night before he married my sister—'It is my punishment, little Bessie. Leave me to my fate. It is only justice.' Poor Lionel!"

"Then—"

"Hush! Don't let us speak of it! I promise you that I will keep your secret, Annie, for his sake. But you must not go away! You must remain near me. I swear to you that I will protect your secret! I will help you to conceal it. My poor girl, if you had only told me this before. But it is not too late now. We will go to our place in the country, dear—you and I together. We are both dead to the world, you and I, and therefore fit companions each for the other. Trust me Annie! No one shall suspect the truth—and yet you shall not be entirely separated from—your child!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

It was as Bessie had anticipated. There was no great amount of persuasion needed to gain the consent of Mrs. Clifton to her removal to the country.

Mrs. Price was sent on in advance to see that the house was properly aired and prepared for their reception.

A small retinue of servants was engaged, and, while Bessie had hoped that she would be allowed to keep house upon a much smaller scale, she was quite content in that she was to get away with only Brenda as a constant companion.

"Take great care of my poor little afflicted one, Miss Goodwin," Mrs. Clifton exclaimed, with the corner of her handkerchief pressed to her eyes, as they were leaving. "If anything happens to her I shall trust you to send me word at once. There is nothing that could

keep me from my dear child when she needs me."

Brenda promised, not failing to notice the little cynical smile that curved Bessie's lip.

"And now let me make my request," said Bessie, quietly. "Don't allow us to be bothered with company! I tell you frankly that we are going to get rid of people; therefore, don't, for Heaven's sake, ask everybody that comes in that direction to stop at Riverview, and bring you news of how your poor, afflicted child is looking. I shan't suddenly blossom into a picture of health and strength, and there is not the slightest danger of my growing any thinner, because I couldn't—well. Let us alone. That is all I ask. When I want anything I shall either send Norton down or write. I may wish baby to come once in a while to relieve the monotony, but when I do I shall send. Don't think it is necessary to fret about it at all, for when I get tired of it, you may be sure that I shall come back. Good-bye!"

She said it all curtly, half irritably. The reference to the baby was made in the same tone that the rest of it was said—naturally, like Bessie's—and Mrs. Clifton saw no reason why she should weep any longer.

She sighed that Heaven had seen fit to send such an affliction into her life as this crippled, wilful child; but she comforted herself by remembering that she must bear her burden with the fortitude of a true Christian.

So she kissed Bessie lightly upon the cheek, and submitted to the inevitable.

Riverview had never looked lovelier than upon their arrival. The old gardener, who had taken care of the place since it had passed, through inheritance, into the possession of Bessie, had devoted all his attention to the lawns and flower-beds; and they, together with the fine old trees, made it a residence to be envied by even the most favoured of the gods. The house was neither large nor particularly imposing; but there was a sweet, home-like air about it that imparted a sense of rest and spiritual comfort to the two weary girls that was infinitely soothing.

"Isn't it delightful!" exclaimed Bessie, the day following their arrival, as her chair was deposited under the shade of a great elm, and she was left alone with Brenda. "It seems to me that I have never been so happy since—since I lost the power of locomotion. The air is as delicious as Paradise. Oh, Annie, I shall never want to leave this; shall you?"

"It is very sweet—very lovely! Dear Bessie, what do I not owe to you?"

"You don't owe me anything! I wish you wouldn't talk like that! It is only give and take in this world. Why should I accept everything from you, and you nothing from me?"

"But what have you not given me? It is more than life—more than reason! Do you think that anything—anything in all this world could ever repay you for the happiness you have given me in this prospect of sometimes seeing—that child? It can't last, I know, dear; but for even such a little while it is like Heaven!"

"Why can't it last?"

"Oh, Bessie, can't you see? Don't you understand that when they return I must go?"

"No, I don't understand anything of the sort! Violet and I never liked each other. I would have prevented Lionel's marrying her at any cost, if I could; but he was bent upon his own destruction. I know Violet better than any one in the world knows her, and—"

"Please don't! I have not the right to listen to you."

"Well, then, I won't, Miss Prim! But there is no reason why she should come here, and shan't! If she should, she would not remain longer than a day, and you could have a convenient headache for that length of time. Do you think that I have taken all the trouble of coming up here only to remain for that little while?"

Brenda started.

"Why," she asked, faintly, "when are they coming home?"

Bessie coloured.

"I—I don't know—exactly," she stammered.

"But when do you think?" insisted Brenda. "There is surely no reason why you should not tell me, and every reason why you should."

"It can't make any difference to you!" exclaimed Bessie, doggedly. "You and I are here for all our lives. We are not going to see people, and we can make no more difference to the rest of the world than if we were lying out there in the country, where we both ought to be. I can't see what difference it could make if they were to come home next week or next year."

"Then they are coming next week!" faltered Brenda.

Bessie looked at her and did not reply.

A ghastly sort of pain was tugging at Brenda's heart. So long as Lionel was abroad, so long as a thousand miles divided them, it did not seem so hideous, so awful that there should be another woman beside him; but to be coming home, to know that she should hear of him day by day, to feel always that terrible possibility of meeting him! There was no language to describe the sensations it produced.

And yet she knew that she was safer from detection and recognition there than elsewhere. With Bessie a sharer, to a certain extent, of her secret, she would have a certain protection beneath her roof that she could not obtain elsewhere.

Bessie interrupted a deep groan.

"There is no reason why you and I should keep this horrible incubus over before our eyes," she exclaimed, in a business sort of way. "Now let us agree that this subject shall be a dead one between us, unless something occurs that should necessitate speech. It doesn't do any good to dig up a grave every hour in the day. You are not going to make the matter any better by grieving over it, and we don't want the serpents in our Eden to be any bigger than is absolutely required. Come, read some of those poems to me. Select the most heart-breaking ones that you can find, and let us see that there are others in the world who have suffered as well as you and I, and perhaps have borne their crosses more bravely."

Brenda turned quickly to the book of poems that she held in her hands. It seemed a relief to her that she was forced to do something that she had been bidden. She opened the book in a haphazard manner and began to read, one poem following another after they had been commented upon.

There was something, after all, in looking into the hearts of others, something that seemed to lighten the burdens of those two hapless beings who sat with closely clasped hands under the shade of the old elm.

A man was coming up the garden walk, but neither of them heard his light footfall—neither of them saw him as he paused, leaning against a tree, to listen to the pathetic words of Mrs. Browning's most touching little poem as they fell from Brenda's lips:—

"Yet who complains? My heart and I!
In this abundant earth, no doubt,
Is little room for things worn out.
Disdain them, break them, throw them by!
And if before the days grew rough,
We once were loved, used—well enough,
I think we've fared, my heart and I."

The voice ceased, and silence fell upon them for a little space; then, as if unconsciously, Bessie repeated:—

"And if, before the days grew rough,
We once were loved, used—well enough,
I think we've fared, my heart and I."

There was no comment, but only the piteous repetition of the words, while the lovely, sensi-

sive lip quivered. Brenda knew where her thoughts were, and the sympathetic hand closed tightly about that of her friend. The touch seemed to arouse Bessie, and she glanced up with a long, quivering sigh.

Her eye fell upon the form of a man leaning against the tree.

He doffed his hat immediately and came forward with extended hand and a smile upon his lips.

He was tall, well-built, and rather handsome of features, though there was an expression about the eyes that one could not quite translate. The hair on the temples had grown white, and the moustache was rapidly turning grey. Perhaps it was that very fact that gave him a distinguished appearance, for certainly he had that to a very marked extent.

Bessie did not return the smile as she placed her hand in his, a fact which he was not slow to observe.

"I am afraid I am not a particularly welcome guest in your retreat," he said, in a well-modulated voice. "I heard you were here, as everyone has, and being the guest of one of your neighbours, I thought I would run over and pay my respects. I am delighted to see you looking so well, Miss Clifton."

"Thank you. You must pardon me if I seemed less cordial than I should have been. It was a great surprise to me to see any one so soon after our arrival. Permit me to present you to my friend, Miss Goodwin, Mr. Best. Mr. Harry Best is, so well known in London that you have undoubtedly heard of him before."

Brenda was about to reply with some polite remark, when the intention was interrupted by Mr. Best.

"I think it more than likely that your friend has never heard of me," he said, quietly, with that inscrutable expression darkening his eyes again; "but I think that I have had the pleasure of seeing—ah—Miss Goodwin before."

CHAPTER XXIV.

It is doubtful which of the two girls started the more violently at Harry Best's remark, but he was not looking at Bessie. His gaze was bent upon Brenda alone, and he was not slow to see the sudden flush that was superseeded by a deadly pallor which could not be mistaken.

She endeavoured to smile, but there was so little of amusement in it that it was pitiful.

"Indeed?" she said, slowly. "May I ask where you have seen me? To my recollection I have never had the pleasure of meeting you before."

Bessie was astonished at the coolness of the tone; but already Brenda was upon her guard. She saw that there was an emergency to meet, and while she could not fathom its meaning, she realised that there would be more serious ones in future, and that unless she was prepared, betrayal was certain. Therefore, she took her emotions well in hand, and but for that momentary weakness, Best would have believed himself to have been mistaken.

He seated himself with cool nonchalance beside her upon the garden seat.

"It was only," he said, quietly, "in a hotel in London. Perhaps I should have been less free in my remarks; but—Miss Goodwin's face is not easily forgotten."

Bessie laughed mirthlessly. She knew perfectly well that Best had spoken less than the truth, but this was not the time to make her knowledge known.

"I think you are quite right," she said, easily. "Her face is not one that one readily forgets. How long have you been in the neighbourhood, Mr. Best?"

"For less than a week."

"And do you remain long?"

"It is indefinite at present. You have come, you know, just at the gayest season. There is no end of things in the immediate future. The people are all up earlier than usual, and

it promises to be a wonderfully happy season. I heard a number of plans made for your amusement, last night."

"I am sorry for that. Miss Goodwin and I have not come for anything of that kind. We want only quiet, and to be let alone. That is the kindest thing that any one can do for us."

"Oh, but that is rank selfishness!" he exclaimed, laughing. "We can't allow you to bury yourselves when we are in such need of pretty girls. Besides that, Miss Clifton, you must remember that your charming nest has the reputation of being the most unique and picturesque place for miles about. You would never wish to shut the world out from it?"

"Yet that is precisely what I wish to do," exclaimed Bessie, making something of a show of that temper for which everyone believed her famous. "I don't like people. I shall have the place posted at once, warning off all kinds of trespassers."

Best laughed, as if he thought a joke was intended.

"I am quite serious," cried Bessie, earnestly. "If you would do me the greatest favour that lies in your power, you will tell every one whom you hear speak of it—that I don't want any callers—that I wish to be absolutely alone. I have come here for quiet and seclusion, and I intend to have it. I don't know these people. Why should they wish to throw themselves upon me?"

"But they are all such dear friends of your mother and of your sister, Mrs. Lionel Warrender," he said, fixing his eyes suddenly upon Brenda.

"Then let them confine their friendship to my mother and my sister," returned Bessie, with a slight sneer, when she saw how quietly Brenda had received the remark. "I am no addition to any entertainment. I don't enjoy state dinners, because I am uncomfortable at the table. I am not a graceful dancer, and I am not particularly gifted as a conversationalist. I should only quarrel with the people if they came, and that might not be altogether pleasant, either."

"I am afraid you are hard upon yourself, Miss Clifton," said Best, not taking her remarks in the least as if they were intended for himself. "You have the reputation of having the finest collection of orchids in the country, and I had hoped for the pleasure of seeing them myself."

"You shall see them now," exclaimed Bessie, as if that would prevent the necessity for another call. "Annie will you take Mr. Best to the conservatory? Don't be gone long, and I shall wait you here."

There was a quick glance passed between the two girls. Brenda saw at once that Bessie had put that upon her in order that Harry Best might not think she was afraid of him, and summoning the utmost sang froid, she arose.

"Won't you allow me to take your maid's place and wheel you in?" asked Harry, bending his glance upon Bessie.

"Thanks—no; not if you will excuse me," she answered, with a slight smile. "I am too comfortable here, and I cannot exchange comfort for politeness, you know, because I have too little of it."

"I quite understand that," he answered, with a sympathetic look.

He bowed to her pleasantly, then walked beside Brenda as she led the way to the house.

"I hope," he said to her, when they were out of ear-shot of Bessie, "that you will persuade Miss Clifton to give up her ideas of seclusion, at least to some extent. It seems to me that it is very selfish of her to want to bury you here in the country, when your life might be such a joyous and happy one."

"You are quite wrong," answered Brenda, lightly. "The desire for seclusion is as much mine as it is Bessie's. You may call it a fad or fancy, if you like, but before coming, our plans were for solitude and study only."

"But all work and no play, you know, makes Jack a dull boy."

"It will not be so with us. We want to indulge desire, that is all. We want to do precisely as we wish, without dictation. It sounds neither polite nor hospitable, does it?"

She smiled agreeably, and Best looked curiously at her.

"How long has Miss Clifton known you?" he asked, with seeming irrelevance.

"A surprisingly short time for the friendship that has been established," she replied, truthfully. "I had the good fortune to perform a slight service for her upon the occasion of our first meeting, which she says saved her life. You know how rapidly that advances a friendship."

"Have you ever met her sister Violet?"

"No."

"She is a magnificent woman, tall, stately, and blonde. I never saw a woman who was more thoroughly the grande dame in my life. She will cut a great swath in society upon her return. She married Lionel Warrender, the son of one of the wealthiest men in London, you know."

"Yes, I know," answered Brenda, quietly, betraying nothing of the emotion that seemed strangling her.

"Have you ever met him?"

There was the faintest possible hesitation; then she answered, in a very low tone,—

"No."

There was a curious, painful pause, broken by Brenda with a slightly nervous laugh.

"Here we stand gossiping and forgetful of the flowers that we came to see. Bessie said we were to return soon. The orchids are on this side. Is not that pink one glorious?"

"The collection is not so fine as that of a friend of mine. I am rather disappointed, I confess. Are you fond of them?"

"Very."

"Then perhaps you will allow me to take you to see my friend's. His place is not a quarter of a mile from here. He is not there now, but our acquaintance is sufficient to warrant my taking you there, if you will go. The servants are there."

"If Bessie cares to go, I should be very glad to form one of the party," answered Brenda, coldly.

"But we could ride over there almost any morning, even if she does not wish it. It would not require more than an hour, and they are really worth looking at. He is a confirmed old bachelor; and there are other things in his house worth seeing."

"Nevertheless, I could not go without her. You evidently forgot, Mr. Best, that I am, after all, only one of the servants here."

"Ridiculous! Yet I can readily understand your position is not a pleasant one. We will postpone the visit, then, until the owner's return; but I can assure you it will not be any longer, as he and Miss Clifton are the greatest of friends. I don't believe she knows that he has taken the old Shipton place, the finest in this county."

"To what do you refer, Mr. Best? I have never heard Bessie speak of anyone in whom she was particularly interested."

"I am speaking of Darcy Brooke."

There was a moment during which the entire room swam before Brenda's vision. Fortunately, she was leaning against one of the rustic seats in the conservatory. There was a silence that it seemed impossible for her to break. Everything before her eyes was black as night, and yet she did not faint. Even before she could see, she spoke to him in a tone that was surprisingly steady.

"I have never heard her mention him," she said, quietly.

CHAPTER XXV.

HARRY BEST was puzzled.

Was it possible, he asked himself, that any girl of her age in the whole world could set so coolly as she had done under the circumstances

if she really were as he suspected? He recalled quite distinctly her violent start when he remarked that he had seen her before; but might there not be some other reason for that? Then, too, why should she be here under the very roof of Bessie Clifton, if she were Brenda Bernstein?

He could not quite reconcile the facts, and the case piqued his interest. He was determined, for more reasons than one, that he would know the truth. His voice and manner were both almost caressing as he leaned toward her.

"I am afraid I have tired you," he said, gently. "You are quite pale, and—pardon me—you don't look strong, Miss Goodwin. Won't you sit down?"

"There is no time," she replied, coolly. "Bessie is waiting."

"But there is another thing that I want so much to see—that is, if I will not be taxing you too greatly."

"Not at all."

"Then it is the Sir Joshua Reynolds picture that Miss Clifton has here. May I see that?"

"Certainly, if you will wait here until I get the key from Mrs. Price."

"I will wait."

Only too delighted that she was to have a moment to herself, Brenda made her escape from the room. When she had reached the seclusion of the library she paused there, leaning against the mantel, and pressing her hands against her breast as one does that has been running.

"Who is he?" she panted, hoarsely, speaking aloud to herself. "Who is he, this man that knows me? For that he does know me I am all too sure. And Darcy Brooke to come here—here, within a quarter of a mile of Havensmere! What am I to do? I must go! I must go back again where I can never look upon the face of my baby! Oh, Heaven, it is hard! It is hard!"

There were great drops of perspiration standing upon her brow and about her mouth, in the fear and agony that were upon her. She forgot Harry Best was waiting, forgot everything except her own anguish, and continued to stand there until she was suddenly aroused by the entrance into the room of Mrs. Price.

"Why, what is the matter, Miss Goodwin?" she asked. "I declare, you were standing there looking for all the world like a ghost. You have given me quite a turn, I can tell you."

"I—I was looking for you," stammered Brenda. "I want the—the—key to show Mr. Best the pictures."

"Then you must have forgotten all about it. Here they are."

Brenda took the bunch of keys from the woman's hand, and passing her own across her face, as if to straighten her distorted features, she returned to Harry Best in the conservatory.

"I am afraid I have kept you waiting an awful time," she said, quietly; "but I could not find Mrs. Price just at first."

"I have passed the time very pleasantly thinking of you," he replied. "You must not be offended with an old fellow like me for speaking to you in that way, Miss Goodwin. I am old enough to be your father, and I am fond of young girls. Shall I tell you what I have been wondering since you have been away?"

"If you wish."

"I have been trying to guess whether you were entirely Spanish or creole. There are not many of your complexion."

"I am neither the one nor the other," she answered, without hesitation. "I am a Jewess."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Best, surprised at the admission. "The young lady to whom you bear so strong a resemblance was a Jewess also; but I did not think of your being one."

"It is just possible that you may have seen me, Mr. Best."

"No; the young lady to whom I refer did not have your name."

"May I ask what it was?"

"Brenda Bernstein."

Brenda was quite prepared for the reply, and also with the answer that she was to make. A cloud passed across her face, and she answered, without hesitation,—

"Oh, I understand it now. Brenda Bernstein was my most unfortunate cousin. We have been mistaken for each other a number of times."

"Why do you say your most unfortunate cousin?"

She lifted her eyes to his, and, allowing them to rest there, said, slowly,—

"If you knew my cousin, Mr. Best, there is no reason why you should ask me. Her life ended in a terrible tragedy."

He did not speak; he dared not. Somehow the expression of her lovely, sad face sealed his lips. He knew not what to say. If this were acting, it was the best that he had ever seen; but Brenda felt that she had borne all that lay in her power. She knew that she dared not leave him; but when he had looked at the picture, which she knew to have been merely an excuse to detain her, she said, earnestly,—

"I am sorry to hurry you, Mr. Best, but I really must return to Bessie. She is alone, and we have been away an awfully long time."

"There is just one thing more, Miss Goodwin, before we return to her. I hope you will not allow Miss Clifton to shut me out entirely from her home. I am interested in you. I should like to know more of you. I hope you will say some word that will procure me an invitation to return. May I count upon it?"

She knew not what to reply, but after a slight hesitation, she said, kindly,—

"I am sure you will pardon me, but I cannot dictate to Miss Clifton who her guests shall be. I am not mistress here, Mr. Best."

"And if you were—"

"Then I should know better how to answer you."

He smiled back at her as she led the way to the lawn.

But Bessie had not been alone.

She had taken up the book of poems that Brenda had laid aside, and opening it, was turning the leaves at random, too much occupied with her own thought upon the subject of Harry Best and his recognition of Brenda to read, when she realized that there was some one hastily approaching her. She glanced up. The book fell from her hands to the ground. A death-like pallor covered her face, and before it had given place to the flush that followed it, both her hands had been taken by two great, strong, well-shaped ones, and a pair of laughing eyes looked into her own.

"I only heard ten minutes ago that you were here," the gentleman said, eagerly. "I have ridden my horse half to death in my eagerness to get here. How does it happen? I did not know that you had a place in this county."

"And I did not know that you had one, Mr. Brooke."

"I have bought the old Shipton place, and what a pleasure that I shall have you as a neighbour for the summer! Have you any of the family with you?"

"No, only Mrs. Price, and a young lady as companion."

"Is she a pleasant one?"

"If you were to ask if I am a pleasant one for her, it would be more to the purpose," answered Bessie, with a smile. "Yes, she is delightful. I am very fond of her. She saved my life, and for once I am grateful."

"I am glad you are so pleasantly situated. Lionel and his wife are coming next week, are they not?"

"Yes."

"I am going to ask them up for a visit to me, and—"

But before he could finish his sentence, Bessie had leaned forward and placed her

hand earnestly upon his arm. Her face was deathly pale.

"Please don't!" she cried out, as if she were in some mortal pain. "It is not often that I ask a favour of any one, but this I ask as the greatest possible favour to myself. Promise me that you will not ask them—at least not for this year."

"Why not?"

"I cannot answer your question, but I give you my word that it is not a mere whim. It is a serious matter to me, and I beg of you that you will grant me this. Perhaps some day I may tell you why I ask it, but at present I cannot. Will you promise?"

"Certainly, if—"

But Darcy Brooke did not finish his sentence. His eyes had turned in the direction of the house, and there, coming down the stoop, assisted by Harry Best, he saw Brenda, the wife of Lionel Warrender, whom he believed to be in her grave.

He became white to the lips, and a single exclamation fell from them.

"Good heavens!"

Bessie followed his eyes and saw her!

She seemed to understand a part of the awful situation in an instant. Darcy Brooke she knew to be Lionel's most intimate friend. He knew! And he, too, had believed Brenda dead. She saw also that there was no use to attempt deception with him, and, leaning forward, without consideration, she said, hurriedly and hoarsely,—

"Do you know her?"

"Yes," he answered, the word falling like ice from his lips.

"Then for heaven's sake be careful!" she cried, warningly. "Harry Best suspects, and he must not know. I tell you that he must not! Call her Miss Goodwin, and speak to her as if she were an old friend."

CHAPTER XXVI.

DARCY BROOKE had had ample time in which to recover himself before Brenda stood before him there by the garden seat, at least in so far as outward demonstration was concerned; but it came upon her like a thunder-bolt.

Harry Best was a trifle behind her, so that he did not see the frightful ghastliness that overspread her countenance; but the chances are that she would have fallen had not Brooke sprung forward and caught her hand in a grasp like iron.

"Miss Goodwin," he exclaimed, his tone a trifle boisterous, even hysterical, in his desire to obey the request—nay, almost command—that Bessie had made, "this is indeed a pleasure. I was not aware that you were a guest of Miss Clifton. How do, Best? Are you an old friend of Miss Goodwin, also?"

"I never met her until to-day," answered Best, more puzzled than he had ever been in his life before. "I was speaking of you only a few moments ago, but Miss Goodwin did not tell me that you were an old friend."

"No?" laughed Brooke. "Why was that, Miss Goodwin? It is not possible that you meant to deny me?"

Brenda tried to smile. The time given her had enabled her to somewhat recover her self-possession, but still her lips were stiff and dry as iron when she tried to force them to reply.

"Mr. Best did not ask me if I knew you," she replied, dully. "He asked me if I did not know that you were a friend of Bessie, and I said that I had never heard her mention you."

"I am glad that was all," exclaimed Brooke, in the same half-boisterous manner. "Are you staying with Miss Clifton?"

"She is the companion of whom I was speaking," interposed Bessie. "I did not know that I was referring to a friend of yours. How often one is reminded of the smallness of this world that is called so big

and wide! One is always being surprised by meeting old friends in the most unexpected manner. I have had some strange experiences myself, and so often hear others speak of theirs."

Best was looking furtively from one to the other. He could not understand the situation in the least. At one moment he believed the story that the girl had told, that Brenda Bernstein was her cousin, and at the next he felt sure that it could not be true. Every thing about this girl was the same as the other, save the short hair and the thinness that was rapidly disappearing. But how was it that Brooke had called her Miss Goodwin?

He readily understood that Brooke's manner was not quite natural; but there were a thousand things that might account for that.

"He would solve that mystery, he told himself with determination. There were the strongest reasons, aside from curiosity and interest, why he should do so, and he would."

With the lightness of a thorough diplomat, he related an experience of his own bearing upon the subject of sudden and most unexpected meetings, that caused them to believe that he was thoroughly deceived; then, after a few more minutes of general conversation, he rose from his position upon the garden seat.

"I have taken the liberty of asking Miss Goodwin over to see your orchids, Brooke," he said, carelessly; "and now that you have come, I hope you will persuade Miss Clifton to break her resolution of perfect isolation, and make a party to see them."

"I shall certainly try," answered Brooke, shaking hands.

"You are surely not going to shut me quite out, are you, Miss Clifton?" he asked, easily.

"I promise to keep all the others away that I possibly can if you will allow me the privilege of coming occasionally."

"Under those circumstances, I suppose I shall have to let you come," laughed Bessie.

Then he shook hands with Brenda, murmured a few words to her, and left them, walking quickly and lightly down the garden path.

It was not until he had quite disappeared that any one of the other three turned their eyes from his retreating figure, and even then there was a painful silence.

Brenda's eyes were fixed upon the ground, Bessie's gaze was directed toward Brooke, and his roved from her to Brenda in a horrified silence that he seemed not to dare to break.

How much did Bessie know of this hideous thing that involved the happiness and honour of her sister? Who was that dead girl whom they had laid in the cemetery? How came she to wear the wedding-ring that Lionel Warrender had placed upon Brenda's finger? And what was he to do now that it was proven that Lionel's first wife lived and the second woman was no wife at all?

Those were the questions that drifted in rapid succession through his mind, those and a thousand others equally unanswerable by himself.

Bessie was the first to speak, her voice so tremulous with excitement and emotion that it was indistinct.

"It was very good of you," she cried, leaning forward toward Brooke. "It was very good of you."

"Good?" he exclaimed, hoarsely. "For the love of Heaven, tell me what it means?" Then turning to Brenda, passionately, "I feel half mad under the confusion of it all! Explain, quickly! We—that is, I thought you dead! We buried you out there—"

She put up her hand with a passionate gesture for silence. He never witnessed greater agony than her eyes held.

(To be continued.)

LAPLANDERS often skate a distance of 150 miles a day.

HANDS AND HEARTS.

(Continued from page 441.)

"He is in for an awful attack of concussion of the brain, and the body has been so poorly nourished, I am afraid to tell you that he will pull through—there, there," in a fatherly manner, "do not break down, I am sure you are not to blame, and you are doing all you can in his behalf."

"Not to blame!" she thought as he left her. "Not to blame! Oh! I have been his evil genius from first to last. If he dies, I am his murderer—and I loved him! Now I would give all I have to undo the shameful past, to unsway my wicked words. Oh! there cannot be forgiveness anywhere on earth for me. Nugent! Nugent! I have killed you."

But though she had once been prone to tears, she shed none now; she sat down to think what she should do, and as she tried to think, the sick man's voice wailed out again and again,—

"Ermy! my wife! my beloved! lost to me—lost! lost! lost!"

She pressed her hands to her ears, but still she heard that bitter lament, and, in an agony of pain and remorse, she despatched a servant for Captain Ferrars, begging he would go to her at once. Then, when he came, she told him all the story of her black deceit, and as she saw the dawning horror and disgust upon his face, she realised for the first time the enormity of her crime.

"Do not leave me in disgust," she entreated. "I have sinned but I have suffered; and oh! I so sorely need your help to repair my wrong."

He could not forget that she had made him her ambassador, and his honest heart was full of wrath as he demanded what she required of him.

"You know where Lady Anstey is; I want you to bring her here. Tell her what you think needful of the story, but do not tell her he is my guest or she will refuse to come—and—oh! listen, how he calls her. Algy, Captain Ferrars, I know you are thinking very badly of me—but for his sake and for hers help me."

"I will do all that I can," coldly, for he hated to think he, too, had come between husband and wife, and because of this woman. "No, do not thank me! I owe them both a heavy debt. Mrs. Delap, if I can possibly induce Lady Anstey to see her husband, you may expect our return quite early to-morrow."

And then, through all that wretched day, the wretched woman bore her burden of grief and guilt as best she might; she never left Nugent's side, she would neither rest nor eat, and it seemed to her she was atoning for all she had done by enduring to listen to those ceaseless cries of "Ermy! Ermy!"

All through that awful night she hovered about the sick bed, like a ministering angel; now and again she would break into a bitter moan, when she thought of all she had made this man suffer—of the weary weeks and months of poverty and toil to which she and she alone had driven him—and then she would cower down beside him and pray that she might die in his stead.

It was no easy task she had set Algy, and he shrank from it with a nervous horror, but none the less he intended to go through with it all, being an honourable gentleman, and anxious to make amends for the mischief he had unconsciously wrought.

He found Ermytrade living in retirement at Anstey Castle, beautiful as ever, but with a weary look in her eyes which went to his heart. He never quite could tell how he began or made an end to his story; only, as he looked on the lovely fair face and saw it change to utter tenderness, whilst the red lips paled and quivered, he thanked Heaven that she loved her husband still.

She rose hurriedly. "Take me to him—"

now—there must be no delay. If—if he must die, at least let him die in the full assurance of my love!"

And then Algy, who had had more than enough of Mrs. Delap's deceit, said, "It is only right that you should know he is lying under your enemy's roof"—she shrank visibly—"but you must remember if she stole him from you, she is now restoring him to you; and at least for his sake endure for awhile to meet her and accept her hospitality."

"I will go," she answered quietly; "at such a time I may well afford to do a little violence to my own feelings!"

As they entered the shaded room, a woman ran to meet them, and grovelling at Ermy's feet, moaned out, "I am a wicked woman, you would do well to kill me where I kneel. I have lied away his happiness, and now I have murdered him. Oh, dear Heaven! I have murdered him."

Ermy would have been more than mortal could she have forgiven and comforted this arch traitress in the first hour of her keen anguish; so she twitched her skirt from the other's hold with a gesture of repulsion, and went swiftly and silently towards the bed where the sick man lay, sunk now in a heavy stupor; and as she looked down upon him she forgot all save his suffering and her own unwitting injustice.

She slipped upon her knees beside him, and whispered into that unheeding ear, "My husband, my beloved! It is I. Can you hear me pray your pardon and your love? Can you feel my touch? my kiss? Do you know that I would willingly die for your sake if by dying I won you happiness and health? I have been a hard and a bitter woman; oh, speak to me! only one little word of pardon!" and then, as in her pause no answer came, she wept as though her very heart would break, but not one sob passed her pale and quivering lips. Neither was she weak for long. Presently she rose, and with a pathetic gesture of entreaty said to Algy, "I have been a sad trouble to you, but you will forgive me that, and—and all my weakness; I shall not break down any more!"

And she did not. It was a strange watch these two women shared. There was nothing in common between them save that fearful anxiety regarding the sick man who, day after day, lay so very near to the valley of the shadow.

It was necessary that each should relieve the other, but each was jealous of the other's ministrations; and to the wife it seemed deprecation that one so lost to all sense of honour as Beatrice should dare so much as to breathe the same air with him.

But there was no unseemly scene between them, indeed scarcely any speech passed, for which Ermy was devoutly thankful.

And when Nugent had lain thus seven long days—and longer nights—consciousness came to him. He turned his weary head upon his pillows, and saw first the tearful face of Beatrice, and he wondered vaguely why she was there; then, as his tired eyes wandered, they met so eager and so loving a gaze that a sigh of perfect content broke from his lips.

"I have woken in Heaven," he murmured, and so fell into a sleep as quiet as a little child's. From that hour he began to mend; and the day came when he was allowed speech with Ermy.

"How did you find me?" he asked, fondling her hands.

"Never mind now. When you are stronger you shall hear all." And then, as her composure failed her, "Can you ever forgive me, Nugent? Can you ever think kindly of me after all my harshness and injustice?"

"Dear, it was I who wronged you! Do I love you? Oh, wife, my wife, to lose you now would be more cruel than death! Heaven grant me many years in which to make atonement for the past."

And Beatrice, seeing their growing happiness and love, could no longer endure to

witness it. She was angry and jealous, for she could no more change her nature than the leopard can his spots; so long before Nugent could be moved she left her house, and indeed from that hour she vanished out of Ermy's life.

Later they heard she had married some great foreign potentate, then they heard no more of her.

And away at Littlemanor, where once they had joined hands only, now heart speaks to heart, and tastes to the uttermost the sweets of a love tried and hallowed by affliction.

And chiefest of all their friends is Algy—now Major Ferrars.

[THE END]

FACETIÆ.

WOULD you sound a speaker's depth—hear him twice on the same topic.

"Is he a man of domestic tastes?" "Very; I understand he flirts with the servants."

THERE is a right time for everything, but the ten-shilling watch seldom happens to hit it.

"THUNDERSTORMS are played out," said the modernist, argumentatively; "we have nothing now but electric storms."

A FEMALE writer says "the nation wants a man." Perhaps she has confounded her own personal wants with that of the nation.

THE wife of a politician must often wish that her husband was as enthusiastic about his family as he is about his country.

WILL: "Been shooting?" BILL: "Yes." WILL: "Kill anything?" BILL: "No; I went alone."

WALKING is said to be the best exercise for brain workers, and it is worthy of note that brain workers can seldom afford to do anything else.

FATHER: "My son, you ought to be married and settled by this time." ADULT SON: "Well, I'm not married, but I proposed to Miss Flirts last night, and she settled me."

"WHAT, having your patent leathers blacked, and bought them only ten days ago! Woe's the leather any good?" "The leather is all right, but the patent seems to have expired."

"LOOK here, Wagster, I've a bone to pick with you." "All right, old fellow. There's a restaurant across the way. Make it a mutton bone, for I've quite an appetite."

SHE: Women cannot be satirical, any more than they can be humorous. HE: If that's so, how is it that when a man proposes, after courting a girl for seven years, she says, "Oh, George, this is so sudden!"

"WHAT is the matter?" she asked, as she met him just beyond the gate of her father's home. "Does your boot hurt you?" "No," he answered, "my boot doesn't; but your father's does sometimes."

FATHER'S BUDGE ON CUPID.—He: "Your father does not withhold his consent to our marriage because I am his employee, I hope?" SHE: "Oh, no. He says he'll give his consent as soon as you get your salary raised."

"DOCTOR," said the sufferer, supinely, as he dropped into the dentist's chair, "my nerve is completely gone." "Oh, no, it isn't," was the cheerful reply. "Wait till I get a firm hold, and you'll realize your mistake."

EVELYN (at the seashore): "I saw you and Jack under that parasol of yours yesterday, and it looked too funny. Why, the handle is long enough for a fishing rod. What do you use it for?" MARION (toying with a new diamond ring): "A fishing rod."

"WHAT does this remind you of?" said Paul, as he was eating fruit at the conclusion of an elaborate dinner of several courses. "Don't know," replied his neighbour. "Some banquet hall deserted, you dillard," was the prompt response.

HOUSEKEEPER: "Has any way been discovered to kill the pests that destroy carpets?" GREAT SCIENTIST: "Yes, madam. Take up the carpets, hang them on a line, and beat them with a heavy stick." "Will that kill the insects?" "Yes, madam, if you hit them."

MAHEL: "There are now over four thousand avocations open to woman?" CLARA: "Dear me! What are they?" MAHEL: "Let—me—see. One of them is marriage and another is—Dear me! I've forgotten the others."

"WHAT do you mean by 'hambugging,' madam?" asked a homely lawyer of an old lady whom he was cross-examining. "I don't know as I can exactly say, sir; but if a lady were to tell you that you're a handsome man, that would be it."

LADY (helping to lobster salad): "I suppose, Mr. O'Flannigan, that you are not accustomed to this dish in your country?" MR. O'FLANNIGAN (concealing his ignorance): "Lobsters is it, madam? Faith, ma'am, the shores of Oireland is red wid 'em!"

"DON'T you know it's wicked to shoot the dear little birds, Oliver? They never harm you." "Zay don't! Ev'ry time I ask mamma what she's spankin' me for, and who told her, she says it was a little bird, and I'm goin' to get even with 'em."

MISS GASKET: "I love you dearly," confessed young Mr. Smithers. "I am so glad," replied Miss Gasket, fervently. "You make me intensely happy," he replied. "I hope I shall continue to do so, for I am to be your stepmother."

MR. HANSON: "I like Miss Sweetie's face. She looks tender-hearted." RIVAL BELLE: "Oh, she is. She has ten of the most disagreeable, stuffy old aunts you ever saw, and she's just too sweet for anything with them. I expect when she gets married they'll all live with her."

"THEY say a husband and wife often change in appearance so as to look like each other, and I believe it's true," said Mrs. Gofrequent. "You and your husband look almost exactly alike." "Yes," said Mrs. Strongmind, majestically, "George has grown to resemble me very much since I married him."

An organist in this city says that the interference of the minister with the music will often drive the organist to drink. It shows what an advantage there is in education for the ministry that the clergyman never allows himself to be driven to drink by some of the music.

Two gentlemen got into a quarrel at their club. Finally one of them, who believes in the code, said, excitedly: "You are a low blackguard and an unmitigated scoundrel. Now, sir, if you are a gentleman and a man of honour, you know what you have to do. Here is my card."

A FAMILY AFFAIR.—Mr. Wickwize: "What seemed to be the trouble next door last night?" Mrs. Wickwize: "Oh, it was just a question as to who had the floor. He wanted to tell her of the fish he had caught, while she wanted to tell him of the smart things the baby had done while he was gone."

FAIR PATRON: "Those morning glories you sold me are no use." SEEDSMAN: "What's the matter, ma'am?" "They never open." "Those seeds, mum, was imported direct from China, mum, and it bein' day over there when it's night here, I suppose, mum, they do their bloomin' after you get to sleep."

FATHER OF THE FAMILY: "No, John is not what you would call a promising boy, but I am going to do the very best I can for him. I expect to send him to college, give him a full classical course, and let him choose a profession. He will be able at least to earn a living, with such a start as that." GUEST: "How about George?" FATHER (with conscious pride): "Ah! George can take care of himself. That boy, sir, is going to be one of the best base ball pitchers in this country!"

HUSBAND: "What did the doctor say, Mary?" WIFE: "Not much. He asked me to put my tongue out." "Yes." "And he said, 'Overworked.' Then you'll have to give it a rest. The doctor knows his business," said the husband, with a long breath of relief.

MOTHER: "I am glad little Johnnie is at last beginning to realize the necessity of cleanliness. He has been upstairs washing himself for nearly an hour." LITTLE DICK (breathlessly): "Mamma, Johnny wants you to give me a penny to buy a pipe." "A pipe?" "Yes. We just broke the other one, an' can't blow any more bubbles."

THE SECRET.—Young Doctor: "Doctor, as the field of my labours will be far removed from yours, would you mind telling me the secret of your success?" Old Doctor: "The whole secret of a doctor's success is to know just how long he can keep his patient from getting well without the patient becoming disgusted with his mode of treatment."

It is related of a certain clergyman famous for his begging abilities that he was once catechising a Sunday school. When comparing himself—the pastor of the church—to a shepherd, and his congregation to the sheep, he asked the question: "What does the shepherd do for the sheep?" To the amusement of the audience, a small boy in the front row piped out: "Shears them."

A CHARMING and never failing recipe by which the most indifferent chef can succeed in getting up a stew is the following:—"If your wife faints, do not spoil her dress by dashing a jug of water over her. Go behind the door and loudly kiss the back of your hand. She will immediately revive and want to know whom you are kissing. Do not tell her, and she will not faint any more."

MRS. MEADOW: "I hate to tell you, Mrs. Suburb, but, really, you ought to know it. Every time I've run into the city lately, I've met your husband on the return train; and every time he was paying marked attention to some woman by his side, and every time it was a different woman. I've seen him with a dozen of 'em." MRS. SUBURB (quietly): "We have been trying to get a servant girl who would stay."

A ONE-LEGGED political orator, named Jones, who was pretty successful in hammering an Irishman, was asked by the latter "how he had come to lose his leg." "Well," said Jones, "on examining my pedigree, and looking up my descent, I found there was some Irish blood in me, and, becoming convinced that it all settled in that left leg, I had it cut off at once." "Be the powers," said Pat, "it 'ad ev been a denced good thing of it had only settled in yer head."

TUESDAY, night. Suburban street. Small child pulls violently at a house bell. First floor window is thrown up. "Stop that infernal row. What's the matter?" "Are you Mr. Higgins, sir?" "Yes." "Well, I want you to come and see mother." "Dash it! you want Dr. Higgins, five doors lower down. I'm a carpenter." Crashes the window down. Few minutes afterward, renewed ringing, performance as before. "Now, what is it?" "It is you we want, sir. Mother's got doubled up in the folding bed!"

FIRST LOVE: "Ah! First love is sweetest!" remarks Ptolemaeus. "Humph!" ejaculates Cynicus. "The object of one's first love is adorned with all the graces. She is perfection, and the remembrance of her remains for ever." "Humph!" "In the morning of life—"

"Oh, life, how pleasant is thy morning, Young fancy's rays the hills adorning!"

THAT'S BURNS—I say in the morning of life, she bursts upon the vision like a glorious star suddenly rising above the horizon, and throws a light upon your pathway that never leaves it. "Humph! Did you have a first love?" "I did." "Who was she?" "She was—she was—let me see! H'm! I don't exactly remember who she was."

SOCIETY.

THE Marquis of Salisbury never wears gloves if he can possibly avoid doing so.

THE broken and distorted foot of a Chinese lady is called a "Golden Lily" by Chinese admirers of such distortions.

ROASTED salted almonds are a recent novel accompaniment to afternoon tea. They are said greatly to improve the flavour of the tea.

THE Duke of Edinburgh has a fleet of fifty silver ships, presented to him at different times by admiring cities and towns.

THE betrothal of the Duke of York and his cousin Princess Victoria of Schleswig-Holstein, will be officially announced within the next few weeks.

TO rub the soles of the feet with lemon will soften and ease them after walking. The more the feet are bathed and frictioned, the smaller they will remain. Elder leaves under the feet will, it is said, prevent fatigue when walking.

THE Grand Duke of Hesse and his youngest sister, Princess Alix, who have been stopping at Schwabach for some time past, are coming to England towards the end of next month, and will stay at Balmoral for several weeks with the Queen.

AMONG things not generally known is the stupendous fact that when the Shah of Persia, Nasr-ed-Din, goes upon his summer holidays he takes with him three hundred wives, a regiment of cavalry, a battalion of infantry, four guns, an ample commissariat department, with baggage, luggage, and snuggles, Persian sherbet in bottles, tobacco, bubble-bubble pipes, and other little kick-shaws.

PRINCESS BEATRICE has always been one of the most sensible of the Queen's daughters, and her sound common sense has on several occasions been useful to her family. It was mainly due to her influence that a misunderstanding between the Queen and the Prince of Wales in late years was smoothed away, and the Prince showed his appreciation of the Princess's influence in this matter by the rapprochement which he permitted to be gradually brought about between himself and Prince Henry of Battenberg.

IT is not often that a child is born in the Mansion House and christened at St. Paul's Cathedral, but this happened in Sir Richmond Cotton's memorable mayoralty in 1875, to a grandson of his. The child—the son of the Rev. W. R. Savage, vicar of Awre, in Gloucestershire, and Mrs. Savage, who was Lord Mayor Cotton's eldest daughter—had Thomas Carlyle for his godfather, and his baptism within St. Paul's Cathedral was only the third on record within two hundred years. To the great regret of his family the boy has recently died, and an exquisite carved oak casket is about to be placed in Awre Church to his memory.

THOSE who come into personal contact with the Duchess of Edinburgh like her Royal Highness immensely. She is always most charming to those who know better than to make unwarrantable advances; but this Imperial lady admits no one outside the Royal family to anything approaching familiarity, and has a most excellent knack of keeping presuming people in their places, due probably to her training in the autocratic Russian Court. On the other hand the Duchess has the happiest manner of placing people at their ease in her presence, formality having little place in her ethics of etiquette. Princess Marie puts on no airs as an engaged young lady and a prospective Queen. She is as natural as ever in the family circle. With outsiders Princess Marie and Victoria Melita observe their Imperial mother's manner in every detail, and follow her excellent example.

STATISTICS.

NATURALISTS say that a single swallow will devour 6,000 flies in a day.

ONLY one couple in 11,500 live to celebrate their diamond wedding.

TWENTY thousand words have been added to the English language in the department of biology alone since Darwin's discoveries.

IN London more fires occur on Saturday than on any other day of the week, and more in August and December than in any other months.

AT the present time it is believed that there are 1,400,000,000 human beings on the globe, but let us suppose that there has been but an average of 900,000,000 living at any one time since the creation. Next, to give room for any possible doubt, we will put the average length of life at 50 years. With the average length of life as above, we have had two generations of 900,000,000 each every century for the past 6,000 years. Taking this for granted, the globe has had upwards of 66,627,843,237,075,200 human inhabitants since the beginning of time.

GEMS.

THERE are not many big thieves, but a good many little ones.

WHENEVER luxury ceases to be innocent, it also ceases to be beneficial.

A CLEVER woman listens to compliments, a foolish woman accepts them.

THE man who is the most awkward at saying nice things is usually the most sincere.

MEN learn by experience, and the most valuable experience is the one which has ended in failure.

WOMAN'S hearts feed on past memories, but men's seldom do more than nibble at such intangible food. A man thinks of what he sees, a woman of what she remembers. He is no more fickle or unfeeling than woman, but he is more of a philosopher, and he does not make himself miserable over the irrevocable.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

A COOLING CUP.—To a quart of mild ale add one wine glassful of brandy, the same of white wine and capillars, the juice of a lemon, and a thinly pared shred of the rind. Throw in a sprig of balm and a piece of well-toasted bread on which has been sprinkled a little grated nutmeg.

BAKED BATTER-PUDDING WITH CHERRIES.—Stone a quart of cherries, and drain them on a sieve, then turn them into a pudding-dish. Beat three eggs without separating until light; add to them a half-pint of milk, two ounces of melted butter, and one and a half cup of flour. Beat; add one teaspoonful of baking powder. Mix this thoroughly; pour it over the cherries; allow it to run through slowly to the bottom of the dish. Bake in a moderate oven one hour. When done, loosen from the side of the dish and turn carefully out, dust thickly with sugar, and serve with sweet sauce.

BAKED HALIBUT STEAK.—Wash the steak and wipe it dry; rub with a little salt and place on ice, or in a very cool place, for an hour before cooking. This makes the fish firm, and better when prepared for the table. Roll the fish in melted butter and flour; butter the bottom of a shallow baking-pan, and lay the steak in; bake in a quick oven until nicely browned; just before removing from the oven pour over the top one well-beaten egg; let it remain long enough to cook the egg, then remove to a warm platter; garnish with parsley, and sliced lemon.

MISCELLANEOUS.

SILKWOOLS are sold by the pound in China. The ashes of burnt corks make good black paint.

FOETY-NINE per cent. of the days in London are wet.

IN France it has been demonstrated that vaccination is beneficial to horses suffering from glanders.

AMONG the wealthy classes of Japan it is considered undignified to ride a horse going faster than a walk.

THE most beautifully lighted street in Paris, and probably in the world, is the Rue de la Paix. It is lighted with gas.

BATHS are curiously constructed. The heart's action is aided by the rhythmic contraction of the veins in the wings.

MORE men have died and are buried in the Isthmus of Panama, along the line of the proposed canal, than on any equal amount of territory in the world.

ABOUT 450 B.C. the Ionians first introduced the present system of writing left to right; previous to the above date, from right to left prevailed.

THE greatest steam vessel ever built, in size, was the *Great Eastern*, which was 692 feet in length, and 83 feet in breadth. The *Teutonic* is 582 feet in length.

AS far as can be calculated, the average length of life, which is computed in the seventeenth century to have been only thirteen years, was in the eighteenth increased to twenty, and in the nineteenth to thirty-six. Men used to be considered old when they passed fifty.

TORNADOES originate in the tropics, and are chiefly found in five localities—the West Indies, Bengal Bay, and the Chinese coast, north of the equator, and in the South Indian Ocean, off Madagascar, and in the South Pacific, near Samoa. In the Antilles there are not half-a-dozen on the average every season.

A COUPLE of bright young men of Cincinnati have invented and patented an electrical device whereby pipemen of a fire engine company may be able to telegraph from the nozzle end of a line of hose to the engine. By a code of signals given on a small electric bell the pipemen can notify the engineer when to start the stream and when to close down. In like manner a distress call may be given to show that the men in a building are in danger from suffocation or other cause.

THE position which Kaiser Wilhelm II. has assigned to women under his august administration only expresses the nation's desire. Germany will go on producing iron soldiers, great scholars and profound thinkers of the male order, but she will add no female names to the illustrious roll. The destiny of her women is that described in no ambiguous words by Pascal: "They shall be keepers at home." And who shall say that is an ignoble destiny?

IN the valley of the Baros, in Abyssinia, there is a community where the women, without holding meetings or agitation of any kind, have emancipated themselves. All the women work hard while the men are idle, but by way of compensation the house and all that it contains belongs to the wife. At the least unkind word she turns the husband out at night, in storm or rain, and he can't come back until he makes amends by the gift of a cow. The wife considers it a duty to abuse the husband, and if she were weak enough to show any love for him in life or grief at his death, she would be scorned by her tribe. The wife, without any reason, may strike her tent and go, taking with her one-third of the joint possessions. The husband, unless he be travelling, may not live out of his tent, but the wife may go to her parents for a year, and annual for the time her own marriage.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

GRITA.—The river at Evesham is the "Upper Avon."
BLUE BELL.—Apply at the Post-office; you will get there very information.

F. M.—The Phoenix Park murders took place May 6, 1882.

VOTER.—Women are not allowed to vote at Parliamentary elections.

TOM.—Sergeant Bates, 1st V.B. Warwick, won the Queen's Prize in 1890.

ONE OF THEM.—There was a dissolution of Parliament and a general election in 1886.

O. J.—The National Debt at the date of the dissolution amounted to £680,691,000.

DOUBTFUL.—If the money is owing it may be legally claimed after twelve months' absence.

LORD S.—An executor may distribute arrears of rent due to a lessor or landlord in his lifetime.

KATHLEEN MAYOBRANE.—The population of Ireland in 1891 was 4,705,161.

A WORKSHIPP.—Mr. Gladstone is about 5 feet 10 inches high, but stoops a little now.

OLD READER.—"Old Parr," of Shropshire, who died November 15, 1835, was said to be in his 153rd year.

THE SWAN.—If you refer to the Lodger Franchise, it was conferred in 1867 under Mr. Disraeli's Reform Bill.

SARA.—The widow is entitled to a third of her deceased husband's movable estate, and the child would get the rest.

GO-AS-YOU-PLEASE.—The City of Paris, of the Imman line, has made the fastest passages of any steamer across the Atlantic.

HAMMY.—Certainly, a man can be a member of the Privy Council without having been a member of the Cabinet.

LOVER OF MORG.—"Rocked in the Cradle of the Deep" was written by Mrs. Emma Willard while on a sea voyage.

BRIGHT.—Bookbinders use glue largely; as also album makers and fancy box manufacturers; printers also require it.

BETHEM.—Over 400 degrees Fahrenheit is a temperature sufficient to bring finest steel to a yellow heat, and fit it for tempering.

T. S.—The Highway Act of 1835 has not been amended by subsequent Acts, but it has not been absolutely repealed.

SAVING.—A female who at 43 years of age deposited £50 with the Post Office for annuity would at 65 years begin to receive £10 yearly.

REKEND.—A child born in prison enjoys no privilege, except you like to count his right to rank as a "prisoner" one.

FLORES.—Children born in this country of foreign parents, not British subjects, must be naturalised in order to make them British subjects.

JUNIO.—If you are big and strong for your age you might be taken at a small wage as an ordinary workman; but to tell you the truth we do not think there is any post you could fill on board "with advantage" to yourself.

BUTTERFLY.—In the days of Queen Elizabeth it was customary to strew green rushes on the uncarpeted floor of the actors' retiring-rooms in theatres—hence the term greenroom. Subsequently it was usual to decorate the walls with green paper, and sometimes the rushes gave way to a carpet of green ba's.

O. F. N.—The thing is impossible; there is nothing you can offer for, consequently no duties or pay; you are over age for entering as a man-of-war's-man, and you have not the necessary practical skill to entitle you to enter as an artificer or even as a stoker; you must either stay on shore or join the mercantile marine as an ordinary seaman; why not?

ANXIOUS MOTHER.—Special care should be taken that children are taught to be kind to animals. Many persons hold that kindness must be taught, that children obey an instinct when they destroy things or take life, and that it is only by precept and example that the natural instincts are bred out of young minds. Certain it is, however, that this branch of the education should not be neglected.

H. T.—The famous Red-Hat Club of Dublin, was a society which barred out all whose hair was covering was not of the most pronounced aburn. In order that no man could gain admission by false pretences, it was required at the initiation of each member that the applicant wash his hair and whiskers in hot soda and water. This effectually took out any "dye" that might have been used.

ANXIOUS.—The climate of southern California is considered as beneficial to most consumptive who are as disease. Those who go early enough are usually cured, and those who are in advanced stages are usually removed to a milder climate than Italy. Frost is rarely known. The air is peculiarly warm and dry. Any specialist regarding the climate and probably about parents which a person of moderate health could follow in southern California.

H. CRICK.—There is a penalty for allowing any intoxicating liquors to be "consumed" on licensed premises during prohibited hours, whether paid for or not, and this would appear to prohibit the entertainment of private friends.

FAUST.—The Lord Chamberlain's right of censorship of plays is conferred by Acts passed in 1751 and 1843; all theatres in a district in which a royal palace is situated must be licensed by him (as chief officer of the Royal household, and guardian of morals in the palace), his permission; (3) he could deal with any public performance, whether by amateurs or professionals.

LADY ANNE.—Here is a French recipe for making in the simplest possible way a perfume "unequalled by a few roses—white ones are best, and their perfume is almost imperishable, put them immediately after they are gathered in your clothes presses and drawers and let them remain there for some weeks, when every article of clothing will be suffused with a scent of new-blown roses.

MALCOLM.—The border as a name was often applied to the common boundary line of England and of Scotland. The position of this dividing line was dependent upon the changes of war; and the border, from the eleventh century until about the beginning of the eighteenth century, was the scene of almost constant wars, forays, and feuds. These wars or disturbances of the border were finally terminated by the legislative union of 1707.

TILL DEATH.

MAKE ME NO VOWS OF constancy, dear friend—
To love me, though I die, thy whole life long,
And love no other till thy days shall end—
Nay—it were rash and wrong.

If thou canst love another, be it so;
I would not reach out of my quiet grave
To bind thy heart if it should choose to go.
Love should not be a slave.

My pious ghost, I trust, will walk serene
In clearer light than glides these earthly morns,
Above the jealousies and envies known
Which sow this life with thorns.

Thou wouldst not feel my shadowy fears,
If, after death, my soul should linger here;
Men's hearts crave light, close tenderness,
Love's presence warm and near.

It would not make me sleep more peacefully
That thou wert waiting all thy life in woe
For my poor sake; what love thou hast for me,
Bestow it ere I go.

Curse not upon a stone when I am dead
The praises which remorseful mourners give
To women's graves; a tardy recompense—
But speak them while I live.

Heep not the heavy marble on my head,
To shut away the sunshine and the dew;
Let small blossoms grow there, and the grasses wave,
And raindrops fall there through.

Thou wilt meet many fairer and more gay
Than I—but trust me, thou canst never find
One who will love and serve thee, night and day,
With a more single mind.

Forget me when I die; the violets
Above my rest will blossom just as mine,
Nor miss thy tears; ev'n Nature's self forgets;
But while I live be true.

P. V.—In taking a vote in the House of Commons each member's vote counts one only; what is no doubt misleading you is the frequently repeated phrase, "two counting four in a division;" what is meant here is that if one party manages to induce two men from the other side to vote with them, these two votes count four; suppose both sides to be 204 strong; take two from one side and it becomes 202 only, while the other remains 204, or two higher; now add the two others, and it becomes 106, or four higher.

ADOLPHUS.—The saying to the effect that a shoemaker should not go beyond his calling, originated with Appelles, the celebrated Greek painter, who set a picture which he had finished in a public place, and concealed himself behind it, in order to hear the criticisms of passers-by. A shoemaker observed a defect in the shoe, came again the next day, and encouraged by the success of his first criticism, began to extend his remarks to the leg of the figure. This excited the ire of the painter, and thrusting out his head from behind the picture, told the shoemaker to keep to his trade, or in other words to stick to his last.

A ROVER.—We never willingly advise anyone to emigrate, especially if, as in your case, he is in constant even if not very lucrative employment at home; at the very least, it will cost you, one way and another, from £10 to £15 from the moment you decide to leave home to ascertain what is obtainable; you find you have then to compete with those "who know the ropes," and it is only perchance after weary days of tramping and vexatious expenditure in "hotels" that you settle at length into a place which is better than the one you vacated in the Old Country only by two or three shillings a week, and worse in not being a pauper.

TROUBLED ONE.—Do not refuse, that is useless; you can be compelled at law to pay the sum demanded; try to "grin and bear it;" paying now may save you from having expenses to pay.

HILDERED.—The word "unhealthful" is unquestionably a correct term as applied to articles or habits which are prejudicial to health.

FAED MOM.—You are beyond age for Civil Service examination now, and must just go for anything and everything until you succeed with something; you have let valuable time pass.

POLITICIAN.—Mr. Disraeli, afterwards Lord Beaconsfield, first became Prime Minister February 27, 1858; Mr. Gladstone was made Prime Minister first, December 9, 1868.

MISS MARTHA.—Cleopatra's Needle stands on the Thames Embankment, the long esplanade or terrace constructed along the side of the river on the north side from Westminster Bridge to Blackfriars Bridge.

DISSENT.—One effect of disestablishment would be to remove the bishops from the House of Lords, and another would be to transfer all ecclesiastical patronage now held by the Crown to some other authority.

HARRY.—The expression "O.K." came from AUX OYES, the name of a fine tobacco. As the name became a trade-mark, when other things were excellent they were said to be AUX OYES.

ERICK.—The widow claims a third of her husband's money and goods, his children by his first wife taking the remaining two-thirds; her children by her first husband have no claim of any kind upon the estate.

CRACKED.—There is a cement of Pompeii sold at the chemist's which answers the purpose; but take some common glue, melt it with acetic acid, and join the broken parts with that; there is no cement to beat that.

VIOLET.—Do not attempt too much; sound knowledge of one or two subjects is as much as you can hope to attain to, and will be found to give you an advantage over most people you are likely to come into contact with.

JACKO.—The monkey's intelligence has never been able to arrive at a point which enables that animal to achieve the untying of a knot. You may tie a monkey with a cord, fasten with the simplest form of common knot, and unless the beast can break the string or gnaw it in two he will never get loose. To undo the knot requires observation and reasoning power, and though a monkey may possess both he has neither in a sufficient degree to enable him to overcome the difficulty.

DIAGUE.—The one remedy which is never administered, but is nevertheless the only really infallible one is—the razor; shave, though you seem to have nothing to scrape; except you are absolutely bald on cheek and chin you will bring the hair; but consider whether you do not come of hairless ancestors; note whether your father or his brothers are bearded or bare; if bare, your efforts to create a new rule in the family will be fruitless.

GHASTLY.—To arrest bleeding the application of a cobweb to the wound has long been a rural custom. Experience has shown that the gossamer of which the web is composed forms a very useful styptic; but a very fatal objection to its use arises from the fact that as an application to an open wound it can never be guaranteed to be surgically clean, forming as it does a net for insects, and at the same time for the germs of many an infectious disease.

A BASHFUL BOY.—To raise the hat properly is something of an art. The proper thing is to raise the hat above the head and bow slightly, moving the hat forward as the head inclines. Or one can also take the hat below the head and bow slightly over it, but the first is the more graceful salutation. Merely to uncover the head without bowing is somewhat military in its method, and it does not appear to convey the same degree of respect.

MARCEL.—Running the gauntlet is a sort of punishment inflicted sometimes upon soldiers. The victim is forced to run between files of soldiers, who strike at him as he passes, often inflicting serious injury. The same form was sometimes given through with as a test of innocence. A double line of men was stationed at a given distance apart. The person to be tried ran, with all his speed, between the lines, the men trying their utmost to kill him but without moving their feet from the fixed line. If the victim came through alive, he was declared innocent; if he fell, he was thought guilty and dispatched at once. The expression is also used when some one exposes himself to severe criticism. He is said to run the gauntlet of public opinion.

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